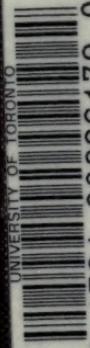
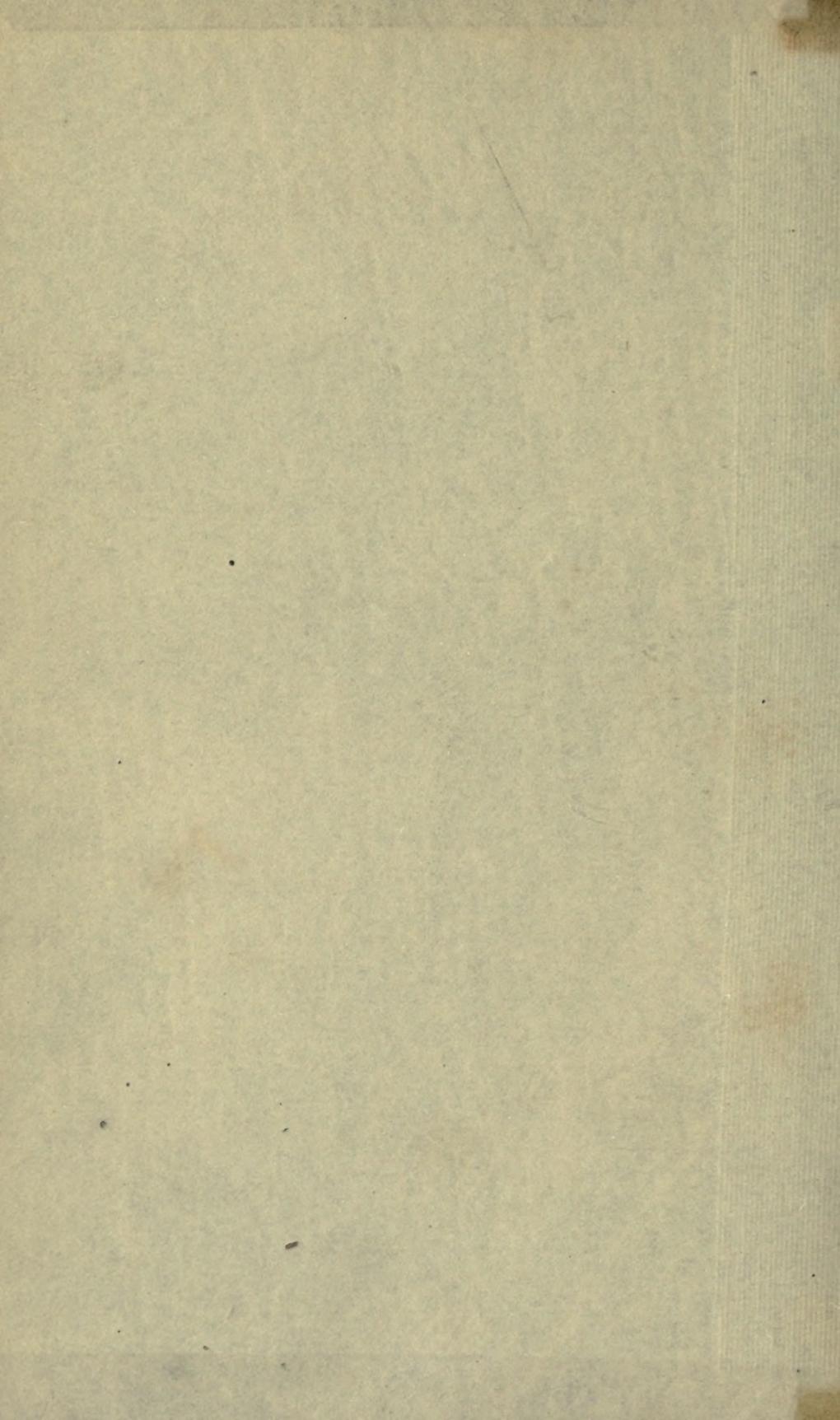


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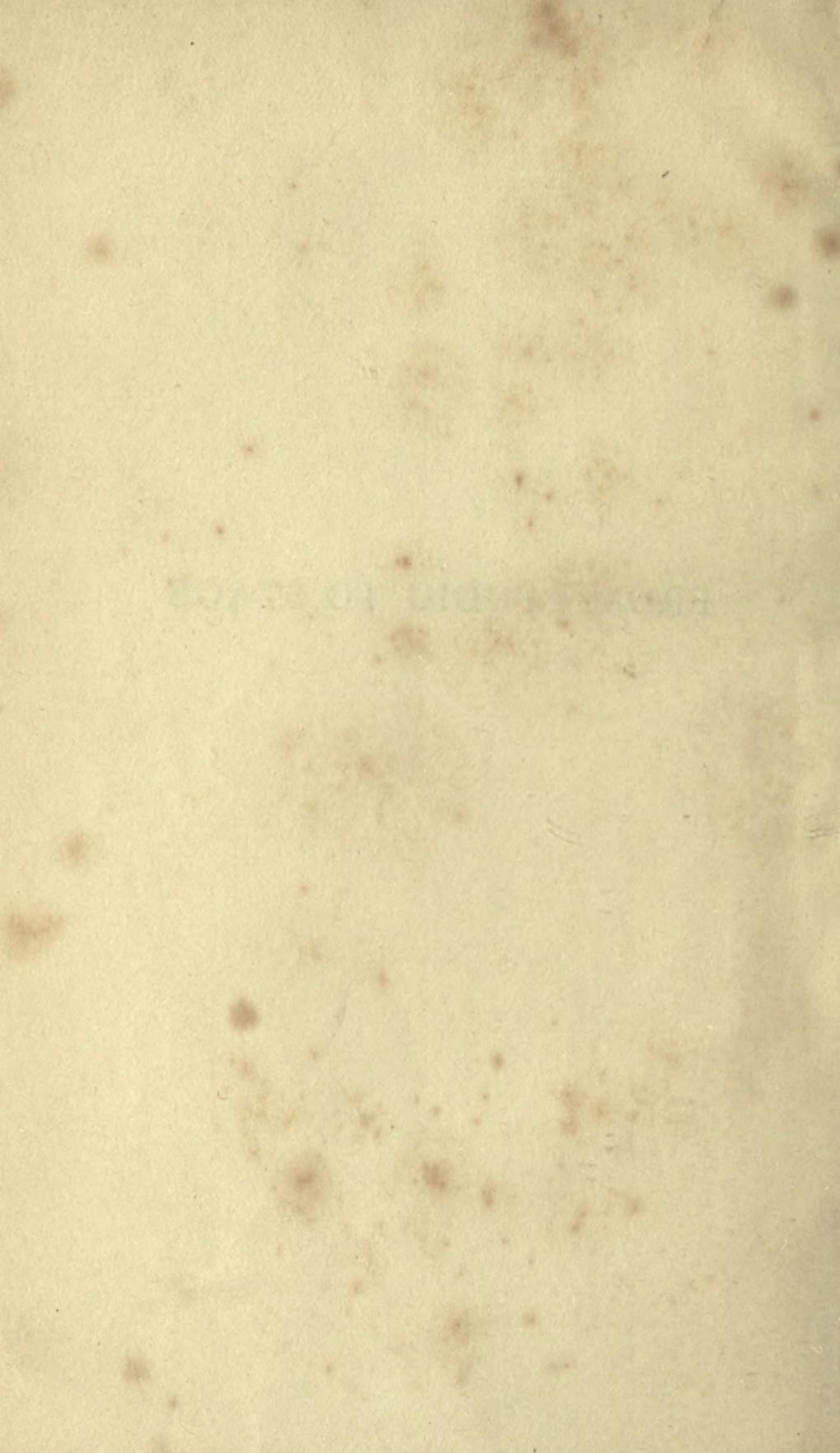
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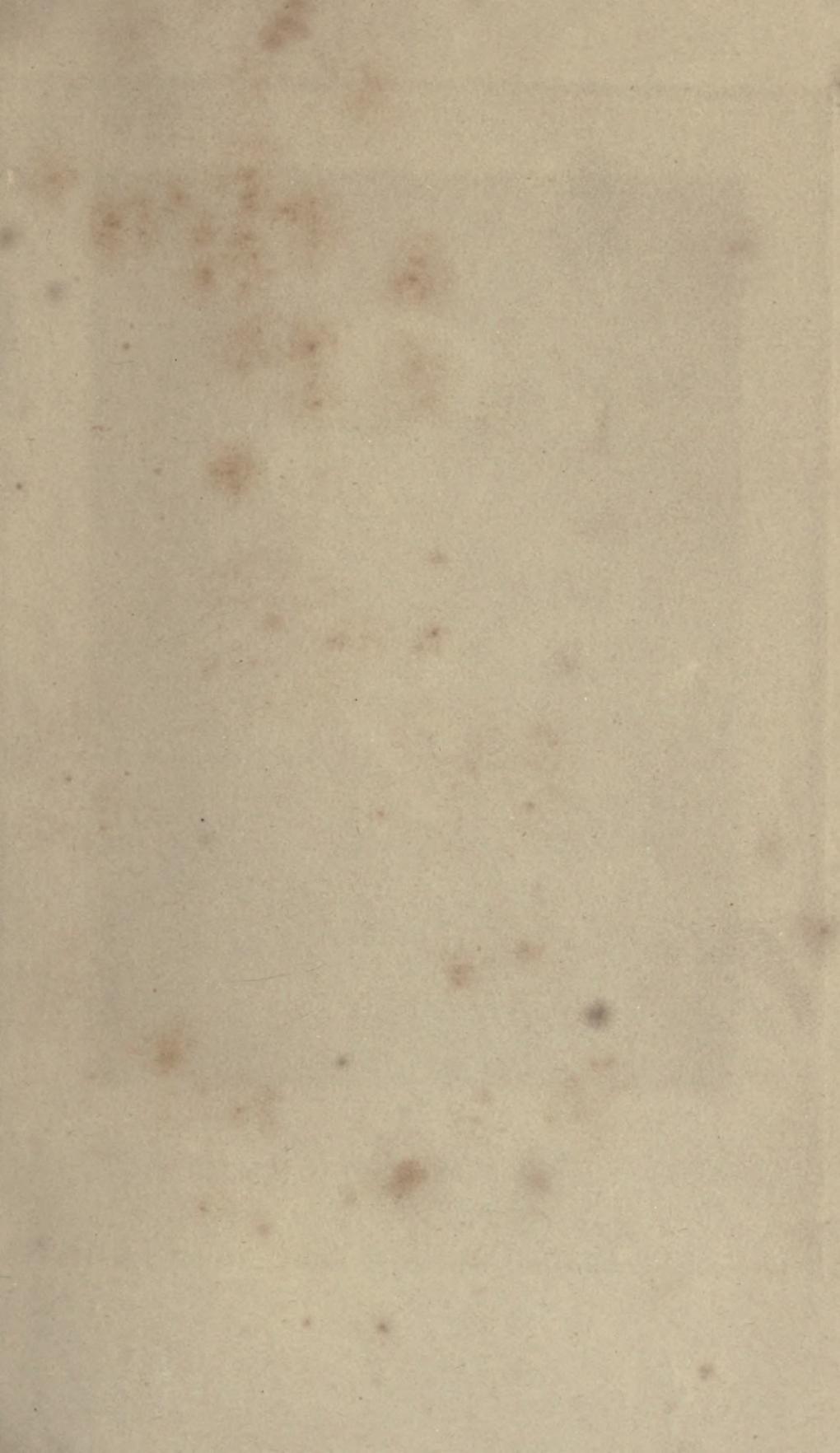
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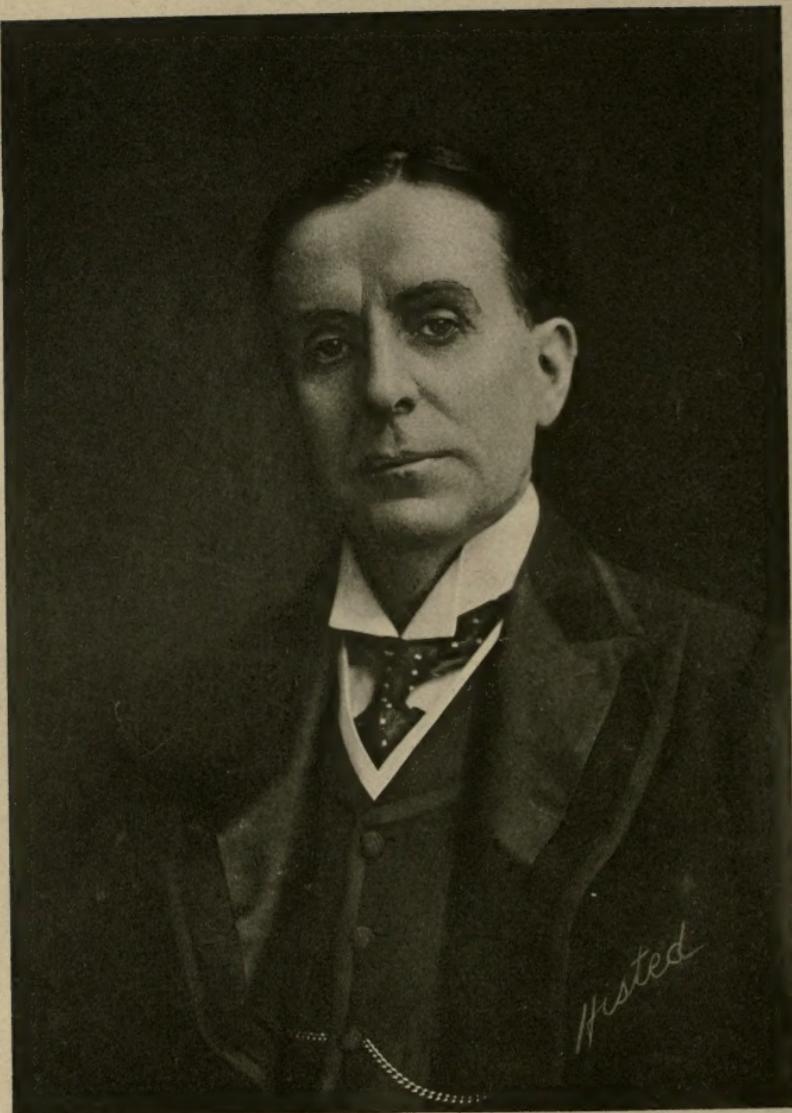
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## **FROM STUDIO TO STAGE**







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W. E. B. Du Bois

FROM STUDIO TO STAGE  
REMINISCENCES OF  
**WEEDON GROSSMITH**  
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF

WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON : JOHN LANE • THE BODLEY HEAD  
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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

WHEN I began this little book it was from a few rough notes jotted down at random, sometimes with a view to an incident in a play, or to enable me to remember the story to which it referred; but one day it occurred to me that perhaps a few of my reminiscences might be somewhat entertaining to my friends and also to the Great Public, to whom I owe so much.

I have simply told my little tales as they occurred and because, as one incident recalled another, it has pleased me to do so. Alas, since I began to put it all down how many dear friends have gone! The word "late" has had to be introduced again and again.

All that remains for me is to hope that my readers will

"Be to my virtues very kind,  
And to my faults a little blind."

W. G. 1912.





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## **FROM STUDIO TO STAGE**



# FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

## CHAPTER I

### SCHOOL DAYS

I AM only aware of two good reasons why I should write these pages. The first and foremost that they may be the means of putting a little money into my deposit account and helping to keep it there if possible. And the second to try and amuse and, I hope, interest a fairly large public.

The fact that I was born was not in itself humorous. I'm sure it did n't amuse my parents, who were not too prosperous, and already owned two luxuries in the shape of a boy and a girl. I believe this great event in English history occurred in Southampton Row, two or three doors from Russell Square, but there is no tablet on any of the houses to proclaim the fact. The County Council is so careless in these matters!

I am the youngest son of the late George Grossmith, the lecturer and journalist, who had a great reputation throughout the United Kingdom in the sixties and seventies, and though probably I may be prejudiced in his favour, he was the finest lecturer I ever heard, with a powerful delivery and a voice as clear as a bell. Standing at a table,

I

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

he could keep an audience thoroughly entertained for a couple of hours without any music or costume to assist him, and he never used notes. But to revert to Bloomsbury. It was in a large and lofty old room in Southampton Row that I showed my first inclination to paint at the early age of two or three years. My father took in the *Times* newspaper, I believe he paid three halfpence a day for the loan of it from about eight till eleven A. M., which was customary in those days, and when on one occasion the newsboy called for the paper it could n't be found; they hunted all over the room, and at last noticing that, for a wonder, I was very quiet, their attention was turned to me, to discover the clock over the theatrical announcements had been painted red and green. As the newsboy declined to take it back in that condition, as it had to be lent again elsewhere, my father after much argument had to buy the paper at its full price of threepence. 'As the boy said, it was now "damaged and worthless." Damaged and worthless indeed! My first painting worthless! Why, to the eager and generous autograph collectors such a prize nowadays would probably fetch a considerable sum, possibly fourpence.

I suppose, like most boys, I was gifted in the art of damaging over people's property, for I remember a few years after this *Times* newspaper episode tearing a leaf of a valuable book, which was the occasion of my making my first joke. It was in Stratton Street, Bedford Square, opposite Sass's (afterwards Carey's) School of Art. The bust of Minerva still remains over the pediment of the



GEORGE GROSSMITH, LECTURER. THE FATHER OF WEEDON



## SCHOOL DAYS

George II building. These premises are now rented by Messrs. Isaacs, dealers in antique furniture.

Carey's was a very famous School of Art. My very dear old friend W. P. Frith, R. A., the Victorian painter, studied there. He informed me recently at a little bachelor dinner I gave in his honour that he was ninety years old, and had never had toothache or headache in his life. The only suggestion of headache he had ever experienced was in 1908 after the excitement of visiting Buckingham Palace when his Majesty the King honoured him with an interview and conferred an order upon him. But to return to my first burst of humour. It was at the age of six or seven. I had been gazing at the pictures of a book of travel, which I had put aside for something more attractive, but not before I had unfortunately torn one of the leaves. My father, although an exceptionally good-tempered man, was naturally annoyed at discovering a page torn in one of his favourite books, and regarding me with suspicion and a proper amount of parental severity, said, "Who tore this book?" I glanced at the cover of the book for inspiration, and my reply was easy. "Father," I said, "it says on the cover who did it. Look! 'Tour by a German Prince.'"

I was forgiven. Like the majority of human beings, my father would make more fuss over a trifle than over a serious event, and here is an illustration. We had left Bloomsbury; my father had taken a little house at Haverstock Hill, Hampstead, with stables attached. Nearly all houses in those days a few miles outside London, no matter how small, had stables, and those who could afford it

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

kept something in the shape of a pony and gig to take them to town, for the only means of transit to the great City, other than a private conveyance, was by an omnibus which started every half-hour and stopped for five minutes at intervals of seven minutes, when the driver generally had a mug of ale handed up to him while he chatted to a few pals.

The London & North Western Railway was of no use, naturally, from Hampstead to Charing Cross. In those days of peace and quiet there were no roaring and shrieking motor buses stirring up the dust, and clanging trams ruining every street they passed through, and as the "cabby" always disputed the fare and wanted double, the horse and gig were very popular with those who could afford such luxuries.

We did not keep a gig, and our coach house was converted into a very comfortable breakfast room looking on to a long garden, and it was in this room I conceived the brilliant idea of making gas from turpentine or benzolin, I forget which, and in company with my brother George, who really ought to have known better (but apparently did n't), I boiled up about a pint of this dangerous liquid in a large workman's oil can that had been left behind. Needless to say, in making the gas, it shot out from the narrow neck of the can with a hissing, roaring noise, and with as much power I should think as would propel an engine.

Getting not a little alarmed, my brother and I thought it was time to quit the room and take to the garden, but not before we had pulled the can off the fire. 'Alas, the "New Gas" ignited. There

## SCHOOL DAYS

was a terrific explosion, a huge flame shot across the room, and we were positively blown through the doorway. Clouds of thick horrible-smelling smoke curled round the plaster ceiling which fell in large pieces. Why the house was n't burned down I don't know.

My father, hearing the noise of the explosion, arrived on the scene, speechless. It was too much for him, and when he did recover his powers of oratory he feebly said, "Blow your heads off as much as you like, but don't blow up my house!" I fear my dear parents had a great deal to put up with.

It was often my habit in descending the stairs to jump the last six or seven, and in doing so I frequently tore the carpets away from the rods, and my heels became imbedded in the mat at the foot of the stairs. My sweet mother remonstrated with me for damaging property, but my father in his quietest and most icy manner said, "It does n't matter to him, he does n't have to pay for it."

Ah! How often have I had occasion to rebuke people in the same way! All my selfishness and thoughtlessness has recoiled on me over and over again. What a difference it makes when you "don't have to pay"!

After I left my first school, which was kept by three ladies named Hay (they were very prim, but very sweet and kind) I went for a little while to the North London Collegiate School in Camden Town. I did n't care for it much, it was so big, and the commercial element predominated. It was more suited to the study of book-keeping than I had a

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

mind for or was interested in, for even at this early age my parents had decided that I was to follow one of the Arts. And the artistic instinct seldom blends with the commercial: perhaps it's a pity for the artistic people that they don't. We used to go for rambles on Saturday afternoons, and one fine day an incident occurred which made an indelible impression on my youthful mind. I had arranged with a boy from a school in Mornington Crescent to go to Primrose Hill, and when on our way there I picked up sixpence on the pavement, our delight was unbounded. We were half an hour discussing what we should do with it, how it was to be spent. At last, as I had discovered the sixpence, I felt it was for me to decide, and I elected to buy a whole "round" of French Almond Rock. I had often purchased a pennyworth, chipped off with a pair of large pincers, but it was never enough. I felt one could n't ever eat enough of this lovely stuff. We marched into the nearest sweetstuff shop, and I bought the whole round for sixpence. I gave my friend half — or nearly half — and we started on it slowly.

We went over Primrose Hill and round the side, where there was a pond, and bushes and fields, now all built over. I suddenly felt curious pains that compelled me to sit down for awhile. The pains increased. The bitter almonds (and there were many) in the French Rock were doing their work; my friend commenced to cry, he too was suffering, but I could n't be bothered with him. My thoughts were entirely concentrated on myself. I rolled on the grass in agony, I drew my knees up to my chin,

## SCHOOL DAYS

and shot them out again, and pressing my hands against my lower chest, I cried hard. I heard my friend groaning behind a bush. He too was in dreadful agony, but I could n't think of him. At last I decided that the best thing to do was to get home as quickly as I could. So I ran home, crying all the way, and confessed all to my dear mother, and with her kind attention was soon well again, but I was off French Almond Rock for ever. As for the other boy, I never saw him again; perhaps he died behind the bushes. It was before my days for reading newspapers, so it was quite natural that I should have never heard of the inquest. If he is alive perhaps he will write to me. I should be glad to know that he is still with us.

On one of these Saturday walks I went to the Welsh Harp at Hendon, in company with a friend named Sidney Boulton and another school-fellow, although I had had strict orders from home not to go anywhere "where there were ponds."

I walked to the end of a long floating raft, which was so slippery that I toppled over into the water and was nearly drowned. I had had a few swimming lessons, or should not have been here now. I fell into twenty feet of water. I did n't know where I was, it seemed hours going down, then suddenly I popped up again and saw water all round me. I struck out at once, but towards the middle of the lake my friends were lying flat on the raft calling out, "Turn round, you fool, turn round!" and though I had never learnt to turn round in the swimming bath, I turned round then, and with my clothes and thick boots on, but was just giving way, when they

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

caught hold of the tips of my fingers and pulled me up. I need hardly say I was much obliged to them, and they have often reminded me since that they saved my life; so they did, but if it had n't been for them I should never have fallen in the water, for *they took me to the Welsh Harp.*

Soon after this event I went for a time to a small private school at Hampstead, where there were only about half a dozen pupils. I was not very happy there. There was a good deal of jealousy and a good deal of favouritism, and a good many rows in consequence, and one of these little arguments was between a boy named Store and myself, and we at last decided to settle matters in a quiet field near by, in the old-fashioned method. A ring was made, and I stood up for a good twenty minutes and succeeded in knocking my opponent out. We shook hands and made it up. I was congratulated by the head boy of the school, a chap named Bartlett, a big, fat, red-faced, good-looking fellow with reddish hair. He always patronised me in the following manner: "Very good, little man," "Very good for you." He then took off my cap and threw it up a tree, and ordered me to climb up after it. He was rather too fond of this tyrannical attitude towards me. If I met him in the streets he would say, "Let me look at your books," snatching them from me; at the same time he would throw them in the road and request me to pick them up. I had to obey, I could n't "take him on" as I did Store, so had to submit to these humiliations.

One day my friend Store said to me, "Why do you allow Bartlett to bully you?"

## SCHOOL DAYS

I replied, "I can't help it, he's twice my size."

"I would help it," said Store; "he never bullies me, does he?"

"Now you mention it," I said, "I have never observed that he bullies you."

"Because he knows better," said Store; "he used to, but I soon stopped that. I gave him a bit to go on with."

"You don't mean to say that you — "

"Gave him a jolly good hiding," said Store, "including the undercut and the tap in the waist. He ran away, he's the biggest coward living, and he cried like a kid. I smacked his face once more for luck and made him apologise. I then took off his cap, ruffled his hair over his face, threw his books in the mud, and told him he could go home and tell his Ma! and at the time I felt rather sorry for him, but he never bullied me again."

I was simply amazed! I said I would never have believed it. What an ass I've been all this time! "If you, Store, can beat Bartlett, what could I do, eh? For I can lick *you* hollow."

"That's true enough," said Store. "So next time he takes off your cap and throws it in the road smack his face, smack it hard, and he'll run away and cry like a baby."

I thanked Store and stood him a cheesecake at the nearest Tuck Shop. I went home feeling that a great weight was lifted off my shoulders, and longing for an opportunity of getting even with Mr. Bartlett. Putting a pillow in an armchair, I had an imaginary practice with Bartlett. How

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

I longed to scrape up a quarrel with him, but, it being Saturday, I had to wait till Monday for my day of triumph.

At length an opportunity came. After school was over I walked home alone, hanging about in the hope of meeting Bartlett; presently I heard the familiar voice calling out in his usual patronising manner, "Hi, little man, don't you hear the King calling you? Then why don't you stop and obey his Majesty?"

I said, "Excuse me, I want to get home — your Majesty!"

"Really," he replied, "then I fear you must wait my Royal pleasure." He took off my cap and threw it in the road.

I picked it up, and with great determination said, "Don't you do that again, if you please, I don't like it."

"Really, and why not, little man?" said Bartlett.

"Because I don't like it."

"Then you will have to lump it," said Bartlett. He was just going to snatch my cap again, when I, what is commonly called, "landed him one on the jaw." Oh, what a smack it was! I then stood on my guard. Never have I seen the expression of surprise so vividly depicted on anyone's face before or since. For a second or two Bartlett seemed bewildered, but *only* for a second or two. Was he going to run away or cry like a baby, or was he going to call a policeman? Neither, as I very soon realised.

He made a wild rush for me; in a second I was

## SCHOOL DAYS

on the ground. I rose, and he ran after me; I was down again, rolling in the mud, and taking up some of it in my mouth. One or two more solid punches, then he let me go. I was more surprised than he was, and much more hurt. I ran as hard as I could home. I do him the justice to say he called out to me, "Little man, I hope I did n't hurt you much, I did n't mean to, anyway; you rather annoyed me, you know."

"That's all right," I replied, and bolted like a hare.

Store called that evening, and I related what happened. I never heard anyone laugh as much as Store did. He threw himself on a couch and kicked his legs in the air. When he had recovered himself he said, "Bartlett! you never tackled Bartlett, *really?*"

"Of course I did," I replied. "You suggested it."

"My goodness," said Store, going into another fit of laughter, "I was only joking. You tackled Bartlett, oh, oh!"

I realised I had been done, made a fool of, so I gave Store another dressing.

About ten years ago I was lunching at some old City restaurant with my friend Harry Birks, the stockbroker, when a big, jovial, jolly-looking man shook hands with Birks, and introduced himself to me. "What!" I exclaimed, "Bartlett," and we were delighted to renew our old acquaintance. I reminded him of this story; he said he had forgotten it, I said I never should.

"Well," he replied, "have a go at me now, then

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

we're quits," and he ordered a bottle of champagne.

I said, "Thank you, Bartlett, I have n't any better chance now than I had then, not so good a one. I'll take on the wine, but not *you*." Bartlett is now a highly successful man — "on Change."

## CHAPTER II

### SIMPSON'S SCHOOL IN ENGLAND'S LANE, HAMPSTEAD

**W**HEN I left this private class I went to a most delightful school, also at Hampstead, in a fine old house standing in its own grounds in England's Lane. The school belonged to Mr. John Simpson, and a better master one could never wish for. Of course we spoke of him as "Simpson" behind his back, but we all had a great respect and affection for him. I saw him recently, and but for his beard being grey, he is as young to-day as ever, bless him!

He was a firm believer in corporal punishment, and so am I. Nowadays, if a street urchin to whose education we rate-payers have contributed at the L. C. C. Schools throws a stone through our window, and we box his ears, his father will take out a summons against us for assault, and, what is more, we shall be fined. This is all wrong. If a boy climbs over your garden wall and steals some apples, you don't want to give him in charge so that he will have the taint of prison on him for the remainder of his life. No, it's much better for him, and for you, to box his ears or give him a swish with a cane, and it does him far more good.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

My master, Mr. Simpson, thought so too, and personally I always preferred to take half a dozen on each hand and get it over than have to "remain in" and write out a hundred lines. I found a little lemon squeezed on the palm of the hand toughened the skin a bit, but as the order for the "swish" came unexpectedly, I was generally lemonless, and, after all, the worst part is the anticipation. The best plan was to put your hand out boldly and think of something else, think of something pleasant and pretty—Mrs. Simpson for choice, for she was beautiful—and it was soon over, and in the cold weather your hands were nice and warm after your punishment instead of being half frozen if you were good, for at Simpson's they were n't great at fires. There was one fire at the end of a very large room, with the Latin Master in front of it. How we used to long for the bell to ring, and when it did how we used to rush out, no matter what kind of weather it was, and make for the Giant's Stride or the "stirrups." We soon got warm.

I don't believe in bringing boys up on steam heat and mufflers; if you are wrapped up as a youngster you will have to continue wrapping up all your life, and the more you put on in the way of clothes the more you will have to. We seldom wore overcoats in the winter, I think we regarded it as "bad form" to do so. As for gloves, well, I 've never worn them at any time of my life except for a dance; in fact, I have n't got any, or have n't had any for years, no matter how much the temperature is below freezing point. As for a fire in one's bedroom it was unheard of in my young days.

## SIMPSON'S SCHOOL

Windows were open all the time.

Being rather flush of pocket money for one week only — fourpence a week was my pay — I made a kind of corner in glass marbles. They were very pretty with coloured twists down the middle, like some of the old wineglasses, of which, by the way, I am happy to say I have collected a fair number.

I had quite two dozen of these marbles, and a dozen in each trouser pocket weighs a bit heavy, to say nothing of the rattling noise they made when one moved.

A new boy arrived at the school one morning, looking a bit more stupid than the majority of new boys, so I challenged him to a game of marbles. In a very polite and mild voice he said he would be delighted "if I would lend him one to play with." I concluded he had n't his handy, so I complied with his request and lent him *one* of my marbles and we played, and in less than half an hour he had won my entire stock and my pockets were empty. He thanked me for the pleasant game I had afforded him, and also for the loan of a marble, which he handed me back and walked off rattling my "corner" in marbles in his pockets. I heard afterwards that he had *no* marbles of his own, so that I had practically advanced him the capital at no interest, which enabled him to bring about my ruin.

There flourished in England's Lane a delightful "Tuck Shop" famous for cheesecakes and three-cornered jam puffs. As I write this, I shudder at the mere thought of such horrors, such' are the changes wrought by time; in those days I was a

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

regular customer at the shop, and so was a school-fellow named Rutter. One day, as I handed over my modest twopence, when about to leave the shop, I noticed Rutter, who had also eaten TWO *penny* tarts, give one penny only to the proprietor. Outside the shop I asked him why, thinking it must have been an oversight on his part. "Oh!" said Rutter, "I always eat the *damaged* tarts, they taste just as good, and it's only that the crust is a bit flattened down, that's nothing."

But said I, "There never are any damaged tarts when I get there; the boys who get there first eat them all" (the "*damaged*" pastry was set aside on a special dish labelled "*Damaged Tarts, half price*").

Rutter said, "Oh! I can always find some—watch me to-morrow."

The next day I went with him to the shop, and while looking about to see what he would have, I noticed that he deliberately but rapidly gave the top of a three-cornered puff a sharp tap with his knuckles which flattened down the light and airy structure, then saying very modestly, as he pointed to it, "May I have this for a halfpenny?" The confectioner looked at it and said, "I didn't see that, I thought I had put all the broken ones together—over there," indicating the plate set aside, but he added, "You can have it for a halfpenny."

I saw the game, and during this conversation had managed to knock the top off a fine-looking cheese-cake and had pushed the half under something else. I came up to where the proprietor was and said, pointing to what I wanted, "There's a broken

## SIMPSON'S SCHOOL

cheesecake on that plate, is it half price?" It was, so I ate it as rapidly as possible and pushed my halfpenny across the counter. As we left the shop I gratefully thanked Rutter for this valuable tip, and promised him that I would not tell any of the other boys, as "it would spoil the market." I wonder whether any of Rutter's relatives were Stockbrokers.

After this I frequently, in company with Rutter, visited the Tuck Shop and partook of "damaged tarts" at half price, but never attained his facility. It was wonderful. I have seen him tapping a cheesecake with a bland smile on his face while he talked "Cricket" to the owner of the shop.

For some time these nefarious practices were carried on triumphantly, but, alas, becoming overbold, I killed the goose with the golden eggs. One evening Rutter and I went with our usual demand, but there was "no damaged pastry at all, *all sold*." "Oh dear," said Rutter, "just have a good look round!" At that moment I pressed down with both hands a heaped-up dish of lovely new jam tarts, just fresh from the oven. I overdid it! and unfortunately my curious action was observed by the long-suffering baker. A look of intelligence, which was as new as the pastry I had smashed, overspread his countenance. "Get out of my shop!" he said rudely. I offered to pay full price for all I had "spoilt," but my offer was refused, and to our consternation he insisted on going back to the school with us, seeing Mr. Kinglet, one of the masters (Mr. Simpson the "Head" was out), and giving him a detailed account of our little escapade.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

When the baker left, I had "half a dozen" on each hand. Next day, at Rutter's suggestion, we again went to the Tuck Shop and harrowed the owner's feelings by telling him of the "awful thrashing" I had undergone, and describing in detail "the *weals* all over my body," and I must have been a bit of an actor even then, for I so wrought on the better feelings of the poor man by my assumption of weakness and pain, that he positively forced on us all the nice new *undamaged* tarts we could eat, and seemed quite upset and ashamed of his part in the affair. Rutter ought also to have gone on the stage.

Some boy in the school, and I think it was Lawford, who was a great pal of mine (he now owns a huge Tile Wharf on the Regent's Park Canal, Camden Town), introduced smoking in the school. There were a couple of old barns where we could hide and light up. The fascination grew, and we all smoked. I used to buy a cigarette with a bit of tobacco leaf wrapped round it and a glass mouth-piece attached for a halfpenny, also a few peppermint drops to eat afterwards to take off the smell of the tobacco. We all got the fever pretty badly and became ardent smokers.

And when on Saturday afternoons we used to take our walk to Finchley with one of the Junior Masters — a good-natured fellow — we so imposed on his amiability that he allowed us to light up when we got into the fields, and so things went on very merrily, till one unfortunate day when Mr. Simpson called on some new residents in the neighbourhood, and suggested that their son should come to

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his school. The lady of the house said she was sure that everything Mr. Simpson had said in favour of the school was true and she should like nothing better than that her son should become a pupil of a gentleman who was as clever as he was popular, but there was one drawback, and to her a very great drawback. Mr. Simpson was most anxious to learn what this could be. Was it that she favoured a commercial education in preference to a classical one? He admitted that perhaps a little too much time was given to the study of the dead languages.

"Oh dear, no," the lady replied, "but my husband and I have a detestation of boys smoking."

"Smoking!" gasped Mr. Simpson, "smoking!" My boys smoking? Where, madam, where?"

The cat was out of the bag, and she told him where we could be seen on Saturday afternoons, so that he could satisfy himself.

It was a fine summer afternoon, when we all made a halt for a minute in a little lane near the "Bull and Bush" at Hampstead, out came our pipes, cigarettes, and on this occasion I had started a three-halfpenny cigar called a "Vevvy Fin," and being all well lighted up, we proceeded two and two on the march.

Presently a muffled up stranger crossed the fields, and as he passed close to me I puffed a good cloud in his face for coming so near to us. He turned down his collar and revealed "Simpson." Like lightning, pipes, cigarettes, and cigars disappeared. And no shag smoked out of a new clay pipe could have blanched our cheeks as the vision of Mr.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

Simpson did. His right hand clutched an imaginary cane. Thank goodness, he had left that behind at home! He only spoke one word that I remember. He took his place at the head of us and said "*Home!*"

I did n't sleep that night; next morning there was a notice up in the Hall that everyone was to attend in No. 1 room at twelve o'clock.

We all filed in at twelve o'clock, and you could have heard a pin drop. There was a pause for about ten minutes, then Mr. Simpson made a very fine entrance and took his seat at his desk. From what I know now from my theatrical experience, all this was carefully rehearsed beforehand by Mr. Simpson and his wife. I have heard many famous speakers in my time, but never have I heard an oration to equal for point, fire, and impressiveness the one which Mr. Simpson delivered that morning. Although it was many years ago, I can remember most of it. Smoking, he said, "was caddish, demoralising, and at all times a disgusting habit for a boy, or indeed anyone, to indulge in. He had fondly but foolishly imagined *his* pupils were gentlemen; most assuredly he had been deceived."

"No, sir," from one boy. "Give us a chance, sir," from another.

"Silence!" roared Mr. Simpson in his best Thespian style. Enter Mrs. Simpson (this, I expect, was her cue as arranged).

"Mrs. Simpson!!!!" the boys shouted, "Mrs. Simpson! ! !" and cheered lustily.

"Silence!" roared the Principal. Mrs. Simpson

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assumed grief and took out her handkerchief and sniffed loudly.

"Not only had we dishonoured ourselves," he continued, "but we had dishonoured him and the school. Our atrocious conduct must surely be the talk of the neighbourhood, and to those within these dear old walls, a shame and disgrace." Long pause (evidently rehearsed, with sniffs from Mrs. Simpson).

"First of all," he continued, "he would ask those boys who had never smoked in or out of the school to hold up their hands."

Two or three very small boys were about to do so, but scowls and surreptitious kicks from the elder boys frightened them, so they kept their hands down.

"Now," said the Doctor, "I have come to the conclusion that there is only one punishment which will meet the offence." I commenced to smile again and took a piece of lemon from my pocket, anticipating the "usual."

"Every boy who has smoked," continued Mr. Simpson, "will be expelled from the school." This was said with deep emotion. It did n't occur to any of us at the time that such drastic measures on the part of the Principal would deprive him of his own means of livelihood. We must have thought he was running the school for fun, so we groaned, "No, sir, give us another chance."

"Silence!" from Mr. Simpson. "This afternoon I will write to your parents telling them why I am thus compelled to send you away with an indelible stain upon your characters." Then, with great

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

dignity, he rose from his seat and said, "Gentlemen, you are expelled!"

Expelled, and my father loathed tobacco! I must drown myself first. Then beautiful Mrs. Simpson approached her husband, with tears and a handkerchief (all rehearsed), and pleaded for us, but Mr. Simpson sternly waved her away. "Please, please," she said, "give the boys ONE more chance." Cheers from the boys. Again affected sternness on the part of the Principal. More pleadings; then Mr. Simpson said:

"Very well, boys, Mrs. Simpson has pleaded hard for you, and for her sake as well as your own I am inclined to soften my heart" (Great cheers), "and I will forgive you, but only on one condition, that you all give me your word of honour, as gentlemen, never to smoke again until you have arrived at the age of twenty." We all promised, and Mr. Simpson said, "Boys, I forgive you," and one of the big boys stood on a form and shouted three cheers for Mrs. Simpson. I shall never forget the excitement, and as she passed us, several boys, including myself, kissed her hands, and had I been tall enough I had the inclination to kiss her on the cheeks, and chance a box on the ears, and so it all ended happily, and I can truthfully say I never smoked again until I was twenty. I kept my word, but I don't think Lawford did, I must ask him.

A few years after this I left Simpson's and was studying Art at a branch of the South Kensington Art Schools in Bolsover Street, Portland Place. I received an invitation to a Christmas Dance at Mrs. Simpson's before the holidays. I was asked as a

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guest and not as a boy; I accepted and went. I did n't seem to know anybody and no one knew me. I wandered about looking for my host and hostess, then had a few glasses of lemonade and leaned against the wall, feeling "thoroughly out of it." I was a kind of betwixt and between and felt hurt and lonely when a parent of one of the boys remarked to me he supposed I was glad that the school had broken up and that I must be looking forward to my holidays! I satirically replied that the Kensington Schools of Art had no vacation at Christmas and left him, and encountered my dear hostess, Mrs. Simpson, who said, "So glad you could come. Awfully nice of you." She turned to shake hands with somebody else, and then came back to me and said, "Oh, by the way, Master — er, Mister Walter" (my first name), "don't drink the lemonade."

"Why not?" I said. I had already had three glasses.

"Because," she replied, "we had to make twenty gallons, and having nothing else large enough to hold it, we were obliged to make it in the boy's bath!"

Just about this time my brother George was a reporter on the *Times* newspaper, and doing very well, but he had great difficulty in saving money, which is always a very uninteresting proceeding. I suggested that he should start a money-box.

"What's the good of that?" he said. "I should always be taking out the money when I wanted it." "No, you would n't," I replied, "for I would keep the key, and then you could n't take any out." He

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

regarded this suggestion as a stroke of genius on my part, and bought a money-box, and handed it over to me with the key. He started the bank with a capital of ten shillings. He went on saving.

One day he said to me, "This is a great idea of yours, Weedon, and you ought to receive some benefit from it."

"That's all right," I said, "I'm not the only bank clerk who is underpaid."

"Quite so," replied Gee-Gee, "only you're not underpaid at all. But I tell you what, Weedon, if at any time you want a trifle there is no harm in your borrowing as if it were from the bank, so long as you refund the money."

This struck me as a most excellent idea, and I readily agreed. I said, "Of course it makes it more like a real bank, because all banks lend money, don't they?"

"Certainly they do," he said, "so don't forget, if ever you want twopence or even sixpence, you know where to get it."

"I do," I replied. "Not that I shall want to avail myself of your kindness," but I hinted that if the tide of ill-luck should ever flow towards me I MIGHT borrow from the bank, at the same time placing an I.O.U. in it for the amount borrowed from the box to remind *me* and protect *him*.

George thought this an excellent business arrangement and so did I.

Well, it was n't many days before that tide did flow my way, and threepence came out of the box, but an I.O.U. went in for the amount. Later on another and another. Where it was first I.O.U.

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threepence, I.O.U. sixpence, it was now more often I.O.U. a shilling, and later I.O.U. half-a-crown. The box got lighter and lighter. The money was there all the same, but *on paper*.

My brother had been staying out rather late at night. I had seen little of him, but I had heard from one of his friends that he was rather enamoured of a lady in the "Corps du Ballet," which fact, of course, he had never mentioned to me. But one fatal evening he excitedly approached me, and in a reckless manner asked me for the key of the box. I was very firm with him. I said, "No, George, I hold the key, that was the condition, it is the only way to save. There is nothing like thrift."

"I know all about that," he said, "but I must have the key. I have an important business engagement to-night, and business is business. I may want money."

"All right," I said, "will sixpence meet your business demands, or is it a shilling you want?" I thought that by borrowing from one of the servants I could meet the demand and save the honour of the bank.

"Don't talk nonsense," he answered excitedly, "hand over the key or I shall have to smash the box." At the same moment he seized the box with both hands from a shelf on which it was kept, it was so light it almost rose in the air.

With dignity I handed him the key! He opened the precious box, it was full of paper. "Good Lord!" he said, "what's all this?"

I felt like a fraudulent trustee, but held my own.

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"George," I said, "there is nothing to fear, every penny will be met in time. It will probably be a *long, long* time, but it will be *met*." It was my intention to pay it all back some day, and I explained to him that it was not fair to swoop down and withdraw the entire contents, and I was quite right. What bank, I should like to know, could stand such a run? The money-box Bank was wound up, the I.O.U.'s were thrown on the fire, and whatever my brother's business engagement was that evening it was very much "off."

## CHAPTER III

### STUDENT DAYS AND THE ROYAL ACADEMY SCHOOLS

**A**S I have said, when I left Simpson's, I went to the West London School of Art in Bolsover Street, Great Portland Street (it was a branch of the South Kensington Museum), and commenced seriously to study Art.

It had always been my ardent wish to become a painter, and my dear mother, who was a Miss Weedon, and cousin of a distinguished Marine painter of that name, seconded my views in this direction by every means in her power. My father, without actually disturbing the idea, would have preferred my going on the stage, as a younger brother of his had made a great success when a child as an actor. However, he gave me every possible encouragement during my artistic studies.

I had had the usual preliminary training at Simpson's in drawing from the flat, and now commenced drawing with charcoal and crayon from objects, cubes, balls, apples, etc., in plaster casts, and later heads and hands from the antique, and oh, how difficult they were to draw. In the evenings I drew from the male living figure; my tender age precluded me from drawing from the fairer sex.

It was here I met Claude Hayes, now the eminent

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Watercolour Landscape Artist, and son of the late Edwin Hayes, the famous Marine painter. Herbert Lyndon — a well-known man about town — also studied here, also Fred Goodall and Pinhorn Wood and Alfred Warner the Architect, and I am happy to say they have all succeeded in their different branches of Art.

Between my Art studies I was learning the violin and practising an hour or two before breakfast at Campagnoli's Exercises. The row I must have made in the house, the groaning and scraping! But I was awfully fond of the violin, and Betjeman, the first violin at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, was kind enough to give me special instruction in bowing. With my usual vacillation of character I got so keen on the violin that it was soon encroaching on my study of Art.

I was rather flattered one day when a friend of mine, one Baxter an artist — and related to the painter whose name has become famous in connection with the Baxter prints — who had drifted from Art into Music and played the violin well, asked me if I would play second violin for a couple of evenings at St. George's Hall? He had to find a band for some amateurs who had taken the Hall to play a Drama and a Burlesque, and he offered me a sovereign for the two performances. I was more than delighted to play as a professional in an orchestra, and whenever I met Baxter I used to ask when we were going to rehearse; he always replied that he would let me know. I was under the impression that we should have a whole week's rehearsals, but on the night before the actual performance he told me to

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be fairly early and they would endeavour to squeeze in ten minutes' "run through" before the doors were open. This was absolutely appalling to me, but Baxter was n't a bit alarmed on my behalf and in his quiet and collected manner said, "You'll be all right, there'll be another second besides you, keep your eye on him and do what he does." I obeyed Baxter's instructions as well as I could, but I must have made a hideous row.

Baxter, who was conducting, was generally looking round the building, yawning, then upon hearing a cue, such as "Cur and coward, defend yourself," he gave a rap with his baton and said to us, "Hurry on F." I glared at the music and could n't see where I was. I said to the second, "What do I do?" "Hurry on F and finish on fifth position," he answered. I made a row which being drowned by the shouting of those on the stage was fairly effective. But I did n't do so well when the heroine was dying from poison and seeing the face of her "dear mother" in the second row of "borders." Baxter got his cue all right, it was "I'm not long for this world," and he waved his hand quietly. I got so confused that for the moment I wished I was n't either. I imploringly asked the second where we were. He replied, "I don't know, we must have turned over a page too much, but it's easy to vamp; it's only 'heart foam stuff.'" We then proceeded to draw out long pathetic notes. I made a fearful row, and twice my bow got on the wrong side of the bridge. The poor girl scowled at me several times and then died in agony, and death must have been a relief to her. It was to me.

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I found it was the custom and etiquette of the band to adjourn between the acts to the nearest hostelry, so I did as the Romans did. I asked the members of the Orchestra (there were twelve) "what they would have?" and they named their favourite poison, and the young lady who attended on us said haughtily, "Band?" I replied, "Why?" "Why," she said, "because you're entitled to twos instead of threes, that's why!" That is, I afterwards learned that the spirituous liquor was a penny less if you had a taste for music.

I don't know what the gentlemen of the band thought of me, I know what they thought of my playing, but they were very kind and sympathetic, and one man after his second "two" asked me whether I "doubled." I was compelled to ask him for an explanation, for his language was Greek to me.

"Look here, laddie boy," he said, patting me on the shoulder, "you're only a youngster, and if you're going to make music your living, you'll have to double, and if I were you I should learn the 'cello as well. They may want a 'cello and not a fiddle, see! For instance, I 'double' the drum with the cornet," and getting very confidential he half whispered, "And what is more, it won't pay you to 'full dress it' every time, in fact you can wear what you like on your *lower half*, it's never seen." I noticed my pal of the drum wore a dress coat and waistcoat and light check trousers. I looked round among my fellow musicians, and observed that the drummer's comments were correct. Several of them had frock or morning coats and a white tie

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always, but the lower extremities were invariably checks, and the Ophiclide went so far as to wear a shining pair of American cloth leggings that reached well above his knees.

It was all a most amusing experience for me, and I enjoyed it immensely.

I forget whether I got my sovereign, I think not; anyway, I was n't worth it.

One day after I had been scraping on the violin for a couple of hours, my father entered the room with a worn look on his face, and asked me whether I was "hoping to be a fiddler or a painter"?

I replied, "A painter, of course."

"I'm glad to hear it," he said, "and I think you ought to be at the Schools at your work instead of disturbing your mother and myself and the neighbours. But one thing is certain, my lad, and that is, if you continue your study of the violin one of two things must happen, I must leave the house or you must, and as I am paying the rent and rates, I am more entitled to the privileges of this domicile than you are." I took the tip and went in for Art seriously and the violin only occasionally. I made up my mind with dogged determination to get into the Schools of the Royal Academy, and worked like a nigger day and night, with this object in view, also studying anatomy at spare times, for it is of course impossible to draw the nude figure correctly, unless you have a pretty fair knowledge of what is under the skin, a knowledge of the bones and muscles, the outer layers and their attachments.

I was plucked the first time, but succeeded at the

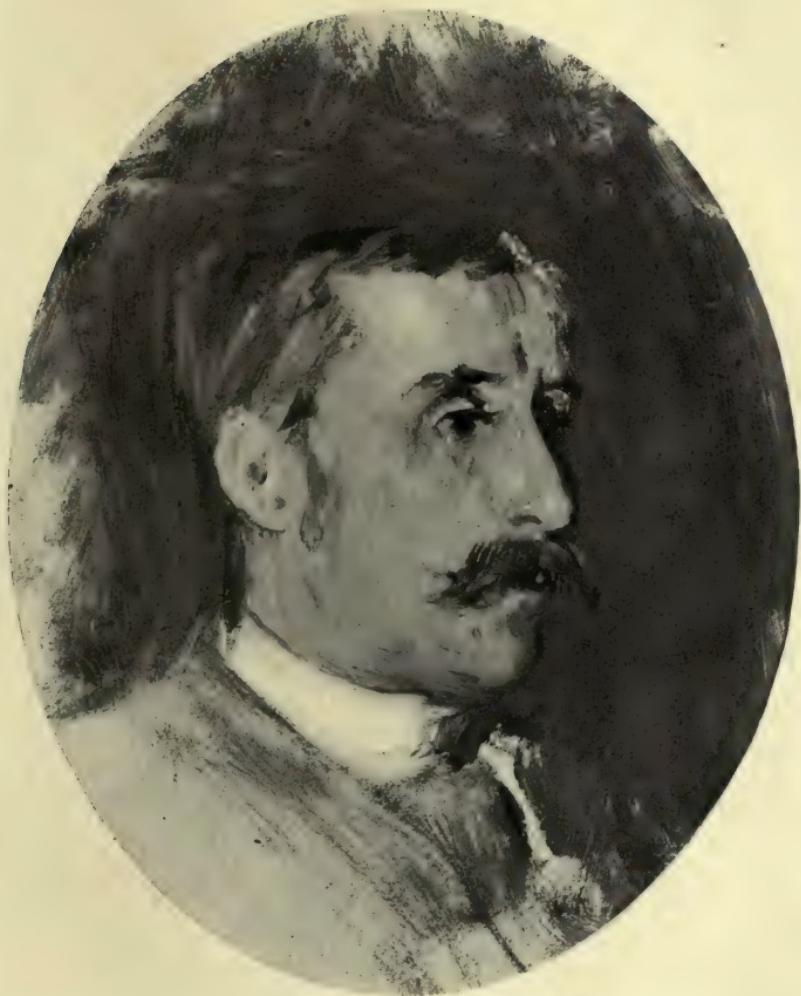
## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

second attempt and was admitted to my great joy as a probationer of the Royal Academy Schools. I passed my probation in the schools in a few months and received my "Bone," giving me the privilege of studying in the schools for seven years. I always considered this a very great feather in my cap, and was very proud of it.

Students at the R. A. have the advantage of having the Academicians for their masters and teachers, and of about half a dozen models sitting daily. There are no fees to pay, not a penny, and the competition for studentship is open to all comers, whether he be a prince or a beggar boy.

As I was not privileged to work from the Nude at the R. A. in the evening classes till I had passed further examinations, I attended the evening classes at London University, at the Slade School, and drew from the life models of both sexes.

At the R. A. my fellow students were Arthur Cope, R. A., Alfred Gilbert the Sculptor, E. A. Marshall,—a painter of pretty women, and member of the Suffolk Street Institution,—Forbes Robertson, the actor, who had already started on his Thespian career at the time I entered the R. A. as a student, Arthur Hacker and Solomon J. Solomon, now both Royal Academicians, were also my fellow students. Herbert Schmaltz and "Jolly James Christie," the Glasgow painter, whom I frequently meet now when touring the North; he recites "Tam O'Shanter" better than any man living. I was also contemporary with those two brilliant painters Stanhope Forbes and Henry La Thanque, and



WEEDON GROSSMITH: A HALF HOUR'S SKETCH BY FRANK HOLL, R.A.  
*Painted in oils by candle light*



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Percy Macquoid, R. A. The latter we looked up to as a great swell; he never seemed to overwork, but he could accomplish in ten minutes what it took other students a couple of hours to do — in drawing — and he is now one of the busiest artists of the day. One of the greatest authorities on costume and antique furniture (on which subject he has written a fine work), armour and silver of every period, he has of late years been responsible for the costumes and scenic arrangements of the finest theatrical productions in London, notably those magnificent stage pictures of Beerbohm Tree's: "Nero," "Ulysses," "Antony and Cleopatra," "False Gods," "Henry VIII," "Othello," etc., to mention only a few.

I am naturally very proud of the successes of my old fellow students, being one of those men to whom it gives no pleasure while clambering up the ladder of fame to meet old friends sliding down or floundering about at the bottom rung.

Though I missed the bull's eye as a painter, I have been fairly successful in the Sister Art of Acting. I have no complaint to make, no grievances to air, and am at peace with all men, and I have n't to my knowledge an enemy in the world, nor has anyone, I hope, a grievance against me, unless it be my old friend Seymour Lucas, R. A., who, when we meet, almost invariably calls me a "traitor" for having forsaken the palette and brush, and I am bound to admit I sometimes feel guilty of having obtained my Academic instruction under false pretences. For it was n't very long after I left the Royal Academy that I deserted

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painting,—vacillating creature that I am and always have been,—to go on the stage.

The late Frank Holl, one of my best and dearest friends and one of the finest portrait painters of this century, went further, for he told me when he was a student at the R. A. he took the gold medal, which carried with it the privilege of two years' free study in Rome, and a handsome allowance from the Academy, but he threw it up directly he got to Rome to come back and get married, so that the two years' study was lost, no student having had the benefit of the travelling studentship for that period. His father, the famous engraver, said, "Frank, you will never be an Academician now. They will never forgive you for this."

But they did, and he was a full-blown R. A. when he was thirty-six years of age. But to return to the R. A. I worked pretty hard at the Academy schools and quickly passed my exam. for the painting class, and was admitted into what is termed the "Upper life."

In the daytime there would be models sitting in fancy costumes, perhaps a pretty girl wearing a hat and feathers.

When we had finished our study, if it turned out well, we touched up the background a bit, put it into a frame, called the picture "Marie" or "Clarice," and sent it to the Suffolk Street Exhibition or the Dudley Gallery, and they were frequently sold, and the Secretary of one of the exhibitions told me that they were generally bought by men, the face reminding them of someone they loved before they were married, and he added, "If

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they could invite the men to private views without the wives they would sell double the number of pictures."

I remember sending a small picture to the Suffolk Street Galleries. I had exhibited there before with some little success, but this time received the notice informing me that "from want of space, etc. etc.," so a few days later I called at the back entrance in Whitcombe Street to get my picture back. A jolly-looking porter whom I knew came to the door, expressed his sorrow that my picture was not hung; he said, "Oh, Mr. Grossmith, I *am* sorry, I wish I had known you had sent something." "I don't know how you could influence the hanging committee," I replied. "No," he said, "I could n't *influence* 'em. But if I'd known you had sent anything, while they'd gone out to lunch I could have popped it up on the wall, and when they came back they would be none the wiser, they'd have thought they had hung it themselves! I've often done it!!!"

## CHAPTER IV

### MY FIRST STUDIO, 8 FITZROY STREET, W.

I HAD N'T been in the R. A. Schools much more than a year before I took a room in Fitzroy Street. I put the shutters up half-way from the bottom and called it a studio, and very soon the smell of tobacco and paint gave it the professional aroma. I painted a three-quarter-length portrait of my father which was hung at the Academy, which pleased me very much. This got me a commission to paint the late J. O. Griffits, Q. C., recorder of Reading. This portrait is now hanging in the Free Library at High Wycombe. Most of the rooms in the Fitzroy Street house were let to 'Artists, but there was "no attendance," so one had to open the door in person to one's visitors and one's creditors and models.

I was fortunate in selling several little pictures of children — there seemed in those days to be a good demand for pictures of rustic children, "Carrying a basket of apples," "Taking dinner to Dadda," and the little money one paid them to sit was of great use to the parents who had five or six little mouths to feed.

One day a little girl of eight, the daughter of very poor parents, who had been sitting to me for a picture of the "pot-boiling" class arrived with a

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rather big wax doll in her arms, and with a message from her mother to ask me, "being an Artist," whether I would repaint the Doll's face, it having at some time or other got too near the fire and the paint and the features were entirely obliterated. I was delighted to please the youngster and, not without a good deal of trouble, repainted the Doll's face as artistically as I possibly could, as I would paint the portrait of a baby, and as I had painted a good many in my time I flattered myself on that line of portraiture. I was rather proud of the result, having got realism into my work, and certainly obtained something like Nature on the wax form in the pearly grey flesh tints, and the drawing of the features, and imagine my feelings on turning the doll round for the approval of the little girl, who on gazing at it burst into a flood of tears. She was dreadfully disappointed and said I had "spoiled Dolly." So with a rag I rubbed off what I had painted, put a very pale tint of pink all over the face, two round daubs of crimson on the cheeks also a dab of crimson for the lips less than half the size of the eyes, two large arched eyebrows, and black lines above and below the eyes for the eyelashes. The child smiled again. It was *her* doll once more, it was perfect.

Before "sending in" to the R. A. I would, like most artists, issue invitations to view the pictures, and I hired a waiter for the occasion and tea was dispensed in the front room on my floor, occupied by Mr. Brooks, a decorative artist, who was good enough to take a holiday on this occasion so that I could have the use of his room.

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The usual number of Bohemians turned up, also a fair sprinkling of Art patrons, who generally asked the price of the pictures, but rarely bought any. Their carriages made a display which was all good for my credit. I happened to be looking out of the front window when to my horror I saw some so-called "smart" people, who had just alighted from their carriage, trying to get to the door, but were stopped because an Italian artist who occupied the first floor was having a most unseemly altercation on the doorstep with a man who was demanding sixpence for having soldered an old kettle which the artist was waving in the air while shouting at the top of his voice that "he would be d——d if he would pay more than twopence for it." This was by no means a good advertisement for a man who was endeavouring to become a fashionable portrait painter. Arthur Cecil, Corney Grain, and J. L. Toole, who all witnessed the incident, were far more amused at it than I was.

While in Fitzroy Street I became acquainted with George Giddens, the actor, who had a studio close by, and Seymour Lucas, who had a studio in Cavendish Square and lived in Queen's Square. He was from the first a great friend of mine, a thorough Bohemian, simple and unaffected. I remember on one occasion when I was shooting at Walter Webb's, at Ewhurst in Surrey, the head keeper mentioned a Mr. Lucas, an Artist who was painting in the village. "Oh," I said, "I know him well, Seymour Lucas, the Royal Academician." "Oh dear, no," replied the keeper, "that could n't be he, there 's nothing Royal about this Artist. Why,

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he walks about the village in his slippers, smoking a long clay pipe." I had spotted the winner.

A well-known model named Foster, who used to sit a good deal to Fred Barnard and Charles Green and Seymour Lucas, was a great character, an awfully good chap, a splendid sitter, and a well-read and intelligent man. He was so much in demand at that time that perhaps if he got a bit spoilt it was really the fault of the artists who encouraged him.

I modelled the character of "Gloucester" in my one-act play of "A Commission" from him, the part my friend Brandon Thomas played magnificently, so well, indeed, that I could n't imagine it being played better, though Burford Morrison, a distinguished amateur actor who has also played it many times, says I am wrong.

To return to Foster. While sitting he would start a conversation in the following manner. "Teddy Leighton"—referring to the President—"was rather humorous the other day, quite the exception for him!" Or, "Johnnie Millais was quite at his best last week, yarning to me about the forty-pound salmon he had gaffed. I suppose it's natural. He can sell a thousand-pound picture every other week, but he can't get a forty-pound salmon once a year. Do you mind if I help myself to another pipe of your tobacco, sir? Thank you, sir. Talking of smoking, I was sitting to little Lucas the other day."

"Do you mean Mr. Seymour Lucas?" I said.

"Yes," said Foster, "there's no other, is there? Well, a well-known patron of art, living in Caven-

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dish Square — *you* know him, Mr. Grossmith — dropped in to see Lucas — very good sort, had rather hot argument on Dickens and Thackeray!"

"Really," I said, rather astonished, "while Mr. Lucas was painting the Gordon Riots."

"Wrong, sir, he was painting Drake playing bowls. Well, 'Cavendish Square' gave me a cigar and said, 'Foster, put that in your pocket and smoke it after dinner.'"

"Which you did, Foster, eh?"

"Wrong again, sir," said Foster. "I took two whiffs and chucked it out of the window. A two-penny stink! That cigar was probably good enough for Teddy Leighton, Johnnie Millais, or Little Lucas, but not for Foster, oh dear, no!" Perhaps he did smoke it, and was only trying to impress me. I'll ask him for the truth when I see him, for he was and is, with all his little failings, a thoroughly good fellow and was devoted to his poor mother, who depended entirely on him for her support.

I had invited my mother and a friend of hers to tea at the studio one afternoon, and was expecting them at half-past four, and at that time there was a knock at the front door which was opened by someone who happened to be going out, which just gave me time to remove an old painting coat and don something more respectable. There was a gentle tap at the studio door, which I opened, expecting to welcome the mater and her friend, when in walked three girls, "models!" "Oh, Mr. Weedon Grossmith," said the eldest, "we've got an introduction to you from Mr. Curtice for

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sittings, we're 'figure,' you know. I should like you to see us. I'm 'full,' but my sister Edie is 'slight.' 'Ere, Edie, slip yer things off and show Mr. Grossmith.'" "Oh, no, not now," I hastily replied, "not now. I'm — er — expecting some friends." "It'll only take a minute," she answered, "and I would like you to see Kate's shoulders, she's got beautiful colouring." "Some other time," I hurriedly replied, "but I'll take your names and addresses," and I proceeded to my desk, and opening the model book, wrote down the names and addresses; on turning round, to my amazement they had slipped off all their things on the floor in a heap, and were posing in far less than Maud Allan ever left on. In another second I heard the hall door open and my mother's voice thanking someone, and saying she knew the way to my studio.

This was a dreadful moment for me; there was a door leading to my fellow artist's room. This was generally locked on both sides. I unlocked my side, and the door opened, and fortunately his room was empty; so I pushed the girls through and threw their clothes after them and hastily shut the door. It was a most unseemly struggle, just as my mother and her friend entered my studio.

I saved the situation for myself, but got my brother artist into a terrible scrape, for a minute or two later his fiancée and her mother, whom *he* had invited to tea, entered his room and discovered three giggling girls only partially attired. My friend had run short of sugar and had rushed out to buy some. The situation was very awkward for

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him, and he told me it required a good deal of explanation, as a designer of furniture does not need living models of the female form divine, and his engagement was in danger of being broken off. In my experience, the generality of models are hard-working respectable girls. But there are two distinct classes of models, those who sit for the figure and those who are draped and who only sit for costume or for the face and hands. The latter I have always found exceedingly nice girls. There were many ladies sitting then, as there probably are now, women of good position but small means, and the wonder is that many more girls whose appearance has been favoured by nature do not adopt this pleasant means of earning a few pounds a week.

My picture being rejected from the Academy, and a rejection of another kind, which for the moment was far more vital to me, made me regard London as a detestable place, more especially Fitzroy Street, which I had always loved. I am happy to say after many years my affection has returned for that delightful old neighbourhood.

Fitzroy Square is particularly interesting with its finely designed houses and its beautifully proportioned rooms and noble exteriors. Shame on us as a nation that such architecture should have become simply a nest of Nursing Homes and foreign restaurants and the refuge of the alien, alas!

In the midst of this temporary gloom I received a most enticing letter from my fellow student Marshall to join him at Olney in Buckinghamshire.

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I jumped at the idea, and lived happily at Olney painting there for five months. Cowper the poet, I believe, went to Olney to die and lived happily for twenty years. I went there in despair, but in less than a week had discovered Elysium — Olney to me was Arcadia.

We lived very cheaply in a delightful old cottage, painting chiefly "pot-boilers" from sunrise to sunset, and fishing in the River Ouse in the evening, and many a good pike, bream, and perch we banked in the Mill Stream of Hipwell's Brewery. What a fascination there is in watching the top of a quill float as it bobs a bit, "twists round," and then suddenly shoots down sideways and disappears into deep water, and the strike and the "Tang" of the line!

But these delightful days naturally became shorter towards the end of October, and by the first week in November a mist rose from the flooded river. The Ouse is a stream that will with the slightest provocation rise and flood the adjacent meadows in a couple of days. This finished the fishing, and fog and mist were not conducive to painting. It was dark about four, and the evenings were long, sometimes *very* long. So we decided to return to the great city.

How delightful it was once again to see the lights of King's Cross, and even the Roads of Pentonville and Euston were attractive to us, and the noise of the traffic was music in our ears.

In that year I went to spend a very pleasant Christmas at the "Platts" near Stourbridge — a very nice old house, the picturesque residence of

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the late Mr. Hodgetts, a big glass manufacturer in the neighbourhood. It was one of those delightful visits where you are asked for a week and stay a month. Some festivity took place every night, games, dances, and dinners. So happy was I that I quite forgot that some day I should have to return to work and hard struggles — not that I minded that, but in the happy lounging existence one is apt to forget it at times.

I was taken by my hostess to a most cheery dance in the neighbourhood, given by Mr. Holberton, where I was so happy that during the evening my exuberance of spirits occasioned me to make an ass of myself.

It is always very dangerous to be funny unless you have a reputation for being humorous; then in that case it does n't matter what you say or do. Since this incident occurred I have acquired that reputation, very many years after the story I am about to relate. I have sometimes told a comic story and have absolutely forgotten the point, but my audience have laughed all the same, probably because they did n't want to be thought ignorant in not seeing the point of the joke. But when you have *no* reputation, *beware*, and it was at Mr. Holberton's that I made that fatal mistake of "trying to be funny." I had taken down a very pretty and charming girl to supper, and ought to have been thoroughly satisfied with my picturesque companion and the pleasant surroundings, but whether I wanted to make myself popular and raise myself in her estimation, or whether from a philanthropic point of view I wanted to enliven the other

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guests, who were perhaps a little quiet, I am not sure, but it occurred to me suddenly that the time was ripe for me to get off a joke that my brother George had often perpetrated, and never failed in, forgetting that he had the reputation and that I had not.

The point of the joke is — at a dinner or supper table, when everyone is engaged in conversation, suddenly to rise, having given the table a slight rap underneath; the result being that the conversation stops, people thinking you are about to make a speech, and sometimes someone will say, “Hear! Hear!” and there is general attention, then in a mild voice you ask someone to pass the bread or champagne, thank them, and sit down quietly. There is a look of amazement for a moment and then roars of laughter. It is about the only joke I know of that is almost a certainty. Cecil Clay told me that he had tried it on all kinds of occasions, appropriate or otherwise, and had *never* known it fail. This occasion at Stourbridge was the exception.

I hesitated several times before I made the attempt. Shall I do it, I thought, or shan’t I? Have I known my host long enough? I had known him two hours, and my companion, the pretty Miss Giles, seeing I was a bit worried, asked me whether she was boring me. This decided me. I did n’t reply. I suddenly gave the table a rap — was it hard enough? I wondered. However, I rose to my feet and called upon a man near me to “pass the champagne.” He was busily engaged with his back half-turned to me, talking to a girl; he handed

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me the wine, saying he was "very sorry," and resumed the conversation, and I sat down in solemn silence and helped myself to a glass. Miss Giles' expression conveyed to me that she thought I was rather rude; in fact only a few noticed me at all, and they a little unpleasantly; some, I am sure, thought I had been drinking; but there was one who had heard me ask for the champagne who was *highly* indignant, namely, the host, who in angry tones called his butler to order for not attending to his guests. I heard the poor old butler, in confused speech, assure Mr. Holberton that he *had* taken the wine round that side of the table quite recently.

"Don't argue with me," my host replied, "but do your duty — that gentleman on the left side of the table, Mr. Grossmith, has just risen from his seat and *asked* for some."

The butler, almost in tears, said he had only just offered the gentleman wine and he had declined. To my horror I heard my host telling the butler not to lie, and he would speak to him in the morning.

I don't know when I felt more miserable. I could n't permit the old servant to get into trouble, he was looking at me with an expression on his face almost pitiable, so I rose from my seat and walked to my host, and addressing him said:

"I'm awfully sorry — it is my fault."

"It's not your fault at all," he replied, "and I must apologise on behalf of my servant, who has been with us too long."

"No, no," I stammered. "Please. It's a joke."

"It's no joke at all to have my guests neglected,"

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answered my irate host. "He has taken advantage of long service, and this episode has decided me. I shall give him notice to-morrow."

I don't know when I felt more embarrassed, and at last I insisted on a hearing, and entered into a lengthy explanation of the joke, which eventually my host saw the point of, and gave vent to a little moderate laughter, and made matters worse by saying, "*I think that's very funny. Do it again!!!*"

My evening was spoilt, and when I went to resume my seat, my pretty partner had gone into the ballroom to dance with a handsomer man.

## INJURED INNOCENCE

'As an instance of how an innocent person may be unjustly suspected I give the following example:—

When I was a young man, living with my parents, I returned home later one night than I was accustomed to and feeling comfortably tired—it was perhaps a little after twelve o'clock. I found my people sitting up for me and playing at Besique. They had not finished their game so I took up a newspaper to read for five minutes before retiring. My father asked me whether I would take anything to drink, and on my replying in the negative he said, "*Perhaps you're right.*" I didn't quite like the way he said it, for there seemed to me a slight suggestion that I had already taken sufficient—a most unfounded suspicion, for I had only had one drink during the whole evening.

I continued reading and presently drew my

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mother's attention to an interesting case in which a police constable pursued a man who had climbed a tree to evade capture and had followed him there.

"Have you read this, Guv'nor?" I said.

"Read what?" answered my father — rather testy at being interrupted in his game.

"Why," I said, "about a Bolly up the tree."

"I don't understand you," said my father coldly.

"I thought I spoke distinctly enough," I answered.

"You were more or less distinct, my boy," he replied, "but I don't understand you. I fail to grasp the meaning of the word 'Bolly.' "

"'Bobby,'" I answered, "means a policeman."

"Then you should have said 'bobby' and not 'bolly.' "

I laughed at my stupid mistake and assured my father that I had certainly meant to say 'bobby.' "

"Then it's a pity you didn't say it," he replied.  
"Perhaps it's due to the lateness of the hour."

I confess I felt a little annoyed and with some dignity said, "My dear guv'nor, you surely don't suggest that I — "

"I don't suggest anything, my lad. I think you are tired and should go to bed."

"Quite right," I said, "I am a little tired, but there is no necessity to insinuate — "

My father quietly remarked that if I meant necessity it was spelt without an "o."

With very great dignity I replaced the newspaper on the table and rising from my chair, said, "Father, are you under the impression that I have been drinking?"

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He simply said, "I am no judge" and went on with his game.

I made no further answer. I kissed my mother and wished her good night: I bowed to my father with stilted politeness, but as I approached the door I most unfortunately caught my foot in the rug and absolutely rolled on the floor, and as I walked upstairs I heard my father say, "Bolly, Necossity — Yes, it's quite time that boy went to bed."

## CHAPTER V

### 82 GOWER STREET

MY next studio was at 82 Gower Street, now pulled down, and on the site stands a huge Gothic building, "Flats." No. 82 Gower Street was built by the famous brothers Adam about 1770 for Lord Eldon (Lord Chancellor), who afterwards moved to No. 6 Bedford Square, (Bedford House), and during the Corn Law Riots the mob attacked the house at night, and Lord and Lady Eldon climbed over the wall into the gardens of the British Museum and took refuge in the guard-house.

A young dentist named Hugh Barber had taken No. 82 Gower Street and expended a good deal of money in doing it up. He let half the house to me and we shared the attendance, which consisted of a Housekeeper and a Page boy.

My chief rooms were on the first floor, a drawing-room in front, and studio at the back. Barber occupied the ground floor for his reception and consulting rooms.

Hugh Barber is now a most prosperous dentist at Newcastle, Tynemouth and Whitley Bay, but in those days he, like many other young men in the Dental or Medical professions, made the mistake of

imagining that, by simply placing a brass plate on the front door, patients would be induced to flock there in hundreds.

There was the green velvet chair, all ready to be wound up, but there was no rush for it!

Barber naturally got tired of this weary waiting, and used to vary the monotony by going out, and remaining out for hours at a stretch.

The patients were very few and far between. One day I heard a gentleman's voice enquiring for Mr. Barber, when the following dialogue took place:

*Gent.* This is Mr. Barber's House?

*Boy.* Yes, sir.

*Gent.* Is he at home?

*Boy.* No, sir.

*Gent.* Not at home! Then what are his hours?

*Boy.* I don't know, sir.

*Gent.* You don't know? He will surely be in in the course of an hour?

*Boy.* I should n't like to say so.

*Gent.* I wish to see him professionally, and I presume he will be in *some time* to-day?

*Boy.* He might, or he might n't. Sometimes he goes out and don't come home not till the evening, and sometimes he goes out and don't come home not at all, all night, not till the next morning!!

I heard the gentleman muttering, "most unprofessional," as he left.

Barber was assistant Dental Surgeon then to the Temperance Hospital in the Hampstead Road, and perhaps he was there, giving pain or relieving it, during this dialogue, but I think not. He was

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always a very skilful dentist, but it naturally takes a long time to build up a practice.

On one of these occasions when he was "out," an elderly gentleman who had knocked several times at the door before it was opened, burst into the hall with a handkerchief to his face. He was evidently in great pain, and, on enquiring whether Mr. Barber was at home, received the usual truthful, but tactless, reply from the boy that he was not.

I happened to be dressed in my frock coat, as I was going to make a call on a probable victim for a portrait, and determined to save the situation for Barber, if possible. I could n't permit another patient to be sent away.

"Good morning," I said to the elderly gentleman, and waved the boy aside.

"Are you Mr. Barber?" eagerly asked the elderly gentleman.

"No," I replied, "Mr. Barber has been suddenly called to the Dental Hospital to attend a very special case and will not be back for a couple of hours, but I am his partner and can attend to you. Walk this way, please," and I ushered him into the consulting room, and pointed to the velvet chair, which he sat in. I worked the plated handles of the chair, and placed a towel over his chest in the professional manner which I had observed Barber do when experimenting on me. I then proceeded to examine his mouth. Even the uninitiated could see it was a good case, and not to be missed on any account. I took up the first tool handy and touched his gums. "Does that hurt?" I said. The patient groaned out that it did. I smiled as if I had made

a great discovery. "Thought so," I said. "Your gums are far too tender at the present time to make a careful inspection, but I will just treat them and alleviate the pain and inflammation." I then opened a drawer and took out a small pair of tweezers, and nipped up a bit of wool, which I dipped into the nearest little bottle. I had to chance this part of the business, but, as luck would have it, it was the right bottle. I then, with the tweezers, passed the saturated wool across his gums, and again putting on the professional smile, I said, "That's comforting, is n't it?"

"Oh, most," was the reply. "Thank you very much, it's wonderful."

"Now," I said, taking up Barber's professional book, and scanning the blank pages with a perplexed look, apparently trying to see if I could possibly fit him in an early appointment. "Now," I said, "if you will please come at — er — 11 — no, that won't do — 12 — er — no, 12.35, yes, 12.35, I can manage to squeeze you in. We are rather full up to-morrow, but at 12.35 Mr. Barber can give you every attention."

He thanked me very much, and was most grateful, and I bowed him out. He kept his appointment, and came every other day for a fortnight. There were half a dozen stoppings and four or five new teeth to put in, and Barber was most obliged to me, and so I trust was the patient.

I had not been in Gower Street many weeks, when I painted one of my most ambitious pictures; it was a six-foot canvas with nearly a dozen figures in it. It was called "Till Daylight Doth Appear."

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

It was of the period of George IV, a gathering of lively bucks round the polished table, smoking and drinking; the host, a "Corinthian Tom," standing up, shouting the chorus of a song, accompanied at a spinet by a typical Bob Logic. My brother sat for the musician, and I victimised most of my friends on this occasion. My father sat, also Forbes Robertson, Rutland Barrington, Perrin Castle Smith, and others. The candles were flickering out, and the cold blue daylight was streaming in. It involved no end of work, and, to get the right daylight effect, for five weeks I got up at daybreak, and my model, Foster, whom I have already alluded to, sat for the costumes, hands, and figure, arriving at 5.30, rather cold.

The disadvantage of early rising is that it makes one so conceited; when I heard the tramp over the pavement of people going to their offices at 9.30 and 10 o'clock, it seemed positively dreadful to me, for I had already done four hours' work.

I sent the picture to the Academy, and also a picture of a pretty little girl. The little girl was hung on the line and sold on the first day to Mr. Muspratt of Seaforth Hall, Liverpool, but my big ambitious work, which I had slaved at for over six months, was rejected. I was fearfully upset. My dear mother cried, and commenced a tirade against the Royal Academicians, the Hanging Committee especially. After declaring them all to be "brutes," and "unjust and unfair," she said, "Oh, how I wish I were an Academician!" "I would hang all my son's pictures on the *line*."

This particular picture was afterwards hung at

the Suffolk Street Exhibition, and I eventually sold it to a provincial dealer for much less than half what it cost me to paint. This disappointment vanished into nothingness at the time of the terrible blow I sustained shortly afterwards. My dear father, while making a speech as Chairman at the House Dinner of the Savage Club, fell dead of apoplexy. I was facing him on the other side of the table. And, about a year afterwards, my dear mother passed quietly away after much suffering, but I am not going, in this book, to dwell on the sad side of life.

I worked very hard and painted several portraits, among others the daughters of the late Sir John Puleston, Mrs. O'Hagan and her little daughter, a life-size portrait of the daughter of Sir Philip Waterlow, which was hung at the Grosvenor, and several others. I also painted a large picture called "Bread and Butter Days," hung at the R. A., and purchased by the late Thomas O'Hagan. I was very busy, and, to my great annoyance, was frequently interrupted by people calling with samples of paints, etc.

On one occasion a man sent up the name of Brown, and said he wished to see me on business. A lady was sitting for a portrait, and I had to put down my brushes to see this intruder, who was shown into the drawing-room. He had called about a patent palette knife he wished to sell. I was naturally annoyed, and wishing him good morning, resumed my painting.

About a month later I was interrupted in the middle of a sitting, by the servant telling me that

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

Mr. Brown wanted to see me for a moment on business. I replied, "Out!!"

Next day the same interruption occurred. "Might Mr. Brown see Mr. Grossmith for two minutes?"

"No, he might not," I said. "Tell him I'm at home, but too busy to see *anyone*!"

A few days later a sitter had just left when the girl said, "Oh, sir, do please see Mr. Brown; he wants to see you so badly."

"Mr. Brown be d---d. Stop, yes, I *will* see Mr. Brown," I said, feeling like a panther ready to spring on him. "Show Mr. Brown into the drawing-room and he'll be done Brown in a minute." He was shown up, and I rushed in, ready to cut his throat with one of his own palette knives.

"Now then, what the D---," but it was n't the same Brown, not the palette knife Brown.

"I really must apologise, Mr. Grossmith," said Mr. Brown, thrusting out a card with a trembling hand. "You are so difficult to see, but I don't want to go back without acquiring some of your work."

It was a famous picture dealer from the North of England. I controlled myself as well as I could, and did n't give myself away. "Yes, yes! I knew who you were, but I've been so busy."

"I know," said Mr. Brown; "if you were n't a busy man I should n't want to deal with you!" He looked round the studio and bought everything I had. Some were sketches and small pictures, for small prices, but he positively bought the lot!!

Later on there were, of course, the usual ups and

downs, and things just then were not too rosy with me. I had painted a pretty picture which was hung at the Academy, but the private view passed without its selling, so did the first few days, and things were looking rather bad. I was behind with the rent and had been spending a little too much on old furniture and other hobbies — always a craze of mine, long, long before it was a *fashionable* craze — when late one afternoon a letter arrived from a Provincial Picture Dealer making an offer of a third of the catalogue price for the picture in the Academy, accompanied by a cheque for the amount mentioned, dated a few days ahead, also a reply-paid telegram addressed to himself. The letter said, “ You must reply during the evening ‘ Yes ’ or ‘ No.’ If ‘ No,’ I shall buy another picture also under offer, which I like as well as yours.”

I thought the matter over seriously, and came to the conclusion that, under the circumstances, I had better say “ Yes.” “ The bird in the hand,” etc., and I might not sell at all. While I was turning this over in my mind, there was a loud knock at the door, and the next minute my friend Claude Hayes came running up the stairs two at a time.

“ Come on,” he said, “ sling on your dress clothes. I want you to be my guest to-night at the Football Club Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant. Herbert Lyndon, Sullivan, and the whole gang will be there.”

“ It does sound jolly,” I said, “ but how about time?”

“ You can dress in ten minutes, can’t you?”

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

"I'll try," I said, "while you have a cigarette and admire my pictures."

In ten minutes I was with him in a cab, bowling along to the Holborn Restaurant.

The dinner was very jolly, very noisy and rowdy. Plenty of wine, a little too much rough play occasionally, especially when the diners commenced to bombard each other with oranges; one taking me across the bridge of the nose made me blink a bit. Roars of laughter as a big chap stood on a chair and announced that it was "time to fall in" and "prepare for the march."

"What's going to happen?" I said to a chap next to me.

He replied, in a husky voice, that they were going to march to the Oxford Music Hall, clear out the people and pull the chaps off the stage if they did n't like 'em. He said, "We're as safe as houses. There will be a hundred men, at least, from Guy's and Thomas's in case we want help."

I said it sounded all right, but if he would excuse me, I would rather not go.

"That's nonsense," he replied, "don't you try to shirk or they'll guy you, see!"

I saw it looked dangerous, so I consented, and we marched along Holborn and arrived at the Oxford Music Hall in a very short time. I did n't care to go with the majority into the body of the hall, where they expected to be busy, so contented myself by going into the balcony, where I eagerly watched the proceedings. There were several small interruptions, but nothing of any importance until the big chap stood on a chair and shouted, "Do you like

the performance?" which was responded to by loud shouts of "No!" accompanied also by shouts of "Shame!" "Sit down!" "Turn him out!" from the respectable members of the audience, and the attendants made a rush for him, but he was surrounded by a solid phalanx of supporters. Once again he bellowed, "Do you like the performance?" and they all shouted, "No!" "No more do I," he shouted back, "and we're going to put out every man who does!" It was pandemonium let loose. The footballers fought not only with the audience and attendants but among themselves, while the medicals went raging and tearing down the stairs on the call of "Any Guys here? Any Barts?" I confess I was so carried away by the scene that I admit I waved my stick and shouted, "Hooray! Hooray!" Perhaps I should n't have done it, but I did n't think I was doing any harm. Immediately I was seized by the scruff of the neck by one of the "Turn 'em outs." I never went downstairs so quickly before or since. I was carried off my feet, and when I came to a clear consciousness of things, I was lying on the pavement of Oxford Street, asking for an explanation. There was another big rush, and out flew a good thirty or forty of my football friends, and some "medicals," who, while they were endeavouring to turn out the audience, got turned out themselves. It occurred to me that while they were arguing, rowing, and still fighting, this was a favourable time to give them the slip and get home, which I did, and with a creditable amount of accuracy fitted the latchkey in the lock and entered my hall. I suddenly remembered that in the pleas-

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

ure and excitement of the evening I had forgotten to send the telegram to the picture dealer accepting his offer of forty-five pounds. I sat down, overcome by remorse and depression. I had thrown away forty-five pounds, and with several bills waiting to be paid. I took up from the hall table a long-shaped envelope. "Another bill," I muttered, and tore it open to discover, to my great delight, a letter from the Secretary of the Academy informing me that my picture No. 505 in the catalogue had been sold that morning for the full price of £150. Now, had I attended to my business and not gone to that dinner, I should have sold the picture to the dealer for £45, therefore he would have made over a hundred pounds' profit, and I only forty-five, whereas, by neglecting my business, I received an extra hundred pounds! An immoral moral!

The next day I mentioned my good luck to a friend, and he promptly borrowed a sovereign from me. A few weeks afterwards he looked me up again, and said he would pay me the sovereign that evening, and would I come with him to the Sadlers Wells Theatre, as he had tickets and he would take me. We went to the "Wells" and presented the tickets; they were not numbered, and the manager said the dress circle was full, but by paying a shilling each he would oblige us by passing us into the stalls. I heard after that these tickets were given away in thousands.

I paid two shillings and passed to the stalls, but before entering the stalls we had to give up our hats and sticks, no one was allowed to enter with them, and a charge of sixpence each was demanded.

I paid a shilling for this, and we were shown into two seats behind a pillar where we could n't see the stage, the place was crowded with the most awful congregation of the lowest set of men and women I had ever seen. So I went back to the Box Office and told the Manager that I was a brother of the well-known actor, George Grossmith at the Savoy, and showed him my card. He said, "Though I don't know you, I am prepared to accept your word of honour that you are speaking the truth and will let you have a private box on condition that you pay a shilling each." So I forked out two more shillings, and we both jauntily walked to the box; the girl attendant showed us in, charging us sixpence for a programme. I had now paid altogether five shillings and sixpence, but we settled down in the box and were prepared for a pleasant evening, when presently the door opened, and the girl put four more chairs in the box.

I turned round and said, "Thank you, we don't want any more chairs, there is no one else coming."

"Oh, is n't there?" she said; "you don't think you're going to have it all to yourselves?" and in came two big, burly costermongers and two women nursing babies.

I need hardly say we left, and went to Sam Collins' Music Hall on Islington Green, where we spent the remainder of the evening and had several drinks — of sorts. The liquor was evidently not of the finest quality, for my friend suddenly showed signs that he had had sufficient. We walked down the Pentonville Road, when my friend remembered that he had n't paid me the sovereign he owed me —

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

I was then quite convinced he had taken too much—and commenced to fumble in his waistcoat pocket for the coin, but seeing some gentlemen of the "Hooligan" class coming along, I said, "Another time."

He replied, "No time like the present, I may not have it *another* time." Taking the sovereign out of his pocket, he handed it to me, but owing to a slight lurch forward he dropped the sovereign on the pavement, and then commenced to look for it.

Seeing the Hooligans were close on us, I with presence of mind said, "Don't look, or they 'll look too; pretend to talk," and I pointed to the beautiful moonlight, and the fleeting clouds overhead. One of the passing roughs suddenly saw the sovereign and pounced on it and picked it up.

I said, "Excuse me, that belongs to me, my friend has just dropped it."

"Funny," he replied, putting the coin in his pocket, "that you should have dropped it and yet you was n't looking for it. Why was n't you looking for it if it belonged to you?" I could n't tell them the reason.

"You 're a nice lot," growled one of them, who had a bandage tied round his head and no teeth. "I 've half a mind to give you something to think about. It 's blokes like you that want to rob the poor."

"'Ere, come along, Mike," said the others, and off they went with the sovereign, which should have been mine. It was my loss, for I naturally could n't expect my friend to pay me again.

## CHAPTER VI

### FRANK HOLL, ROYAL ACADEMY STUDENTS' DINNER, AND AMATEUR THEATRICALS

SOON after this time I took the chair at the big annual dinner of the Royal Academy Students held at St. James' Hall, and most of the Academicians were present, including the President, Sir Frederick Leighton, who sat on my right. After the usual speeches, the healths of the successful prize winners were drunk and received with cheers, and each one in turn had to respond. Their powers of oratory in no way interfered with the reputation of Cicero. Nothing could have been more feeble. There was one exception, this one the winner of the Medal for sculpture. He had evidently prepared and learned his speech, which he threw off his chest in the manner of the Socialistic spouter in Hyde Park; he terminated it in the following manner: "And now, Mr. Chairman, my Lord (there was *one* present), Mr. President, Royal Academicians, associates and fellow students, let me conclude my very humble oration by thanking you for the hearty manner you have drunk my health, and the able way it was proposed by the chairman, and let me remind you all present that my humble piece of sculpture that has gained the medal, poor thing

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

as it may be (cries of "No! No!"), it will anyway live long after everyone here present to-night is *dead and rotten* in their graves!!"

Frank Holl, the great painter, was one of the dearest and kindest friends I ever had. He never seemed tired of giving me every kind of encouragement in the Art, and would assist me in every way possible, as far as instruction was concerned.

He was very fond of painting tragic subjects and painted several pictures of funerals,— powerful and pathetic in the extreme. When he became a famous portrait painter, George Augustus Sala, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, criticised one of his portraits which had a dark background, as "a powerful piece of work," "but funereal in treatment," and reminiscent of "Port Wine and Cake on the sideboard."

Holl was a thoroughly realistic painter and never did anything from imagination (no cooking up in the studio from memory), and when he painted a portrait it was the living person, not flattered, or worked up into a pretty picture, but the pure unvarnished truth. I think sometimes he gave a little offence in this way. One of his victims,— as *he* called them,— an old gentleman whom he painted (I think, for the Board of Trade), was ninety-five, and when asked by the subscribers what he thought of his portrait he replied, "It's very good, but Holl makes me look *so old*." Cousins, the celebrated Engraver, whom Holl painted, was absolutely offended with him, and would not allow his portrait to be exhibited anywhere. My remembrance of it was that it was simply a remarkable likeness.

## FRANK HOLL

I used to go to Criccieth in Wales (the home of Lloyd George) with Frank Holl to paint, and delightful times they were. While I was painting the pot-boiler class, "child with basket sitting on a stile," Holl was depicting a tragedy in a little dark cottage, with poor women and ragged children for sitters. And how kind he was to them! His short visit of a week paid for their living for the best part of a year.

On one occasion I remember there was a terrific sea on as we were walking along the shore, and the sky was full of dark clouds. Holl, I noticed, kept stopping and looking out to sea. I said I should be sorry to be in a ship on that sea. "Yes," said Holl, still staring out towards the horizon, "I should awfully like to paint a shipwreck, a large canvas."

I loved the idea of his painting big picture subjects, so I said, "What a splendid idea! Why don't you paint a shipwreck?"

"I could n't," he replied, "because I 've never *seen* one."

When among a few friends I used sometimes to give imitations of different schools of acting, also an imitation of the typical shouting music-hall singer of the time, with his apologetic speech for not obliging again, after he had taken three calls. Those were the days when the "Chairman" was in vogue, who sat in front of a table with his back to the stage and a looking-glass in front of him, so that he could see the "Artiste" make his or her appearance. He generally announced, "Your old favourite, Mr. So and So, will oblige," and when he

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

did so, he started the applause by rapping the table vigorously with his hammer. He used to reserve a few seats round his table for "the gentry," and it was considered an honour to be invited there by him. I have had that honour conferred on me, and a waiter reminded me of the etiquette to ask the chairman if he would take a drink. I never knew a chairman refuse one, and with a nod of the head to the waiter he would say, "Fred, you know, the *usual*." The "usual" consisted generally of a soda and lemon, the price of which was a shilling; he would also, with a very little pressure, accept a cigar, another shilling (wholesale price, five for a shilling). I am bound to say I never begrudged the cost, for his conversation was generally amusing.

My dear old friends Toole and Sir Henry Irving used to be greatly amused with my Music Hall imitations. I was called upon frequently to give them, and no one seemed to enjoy them more than the First gentleman in Europe, before whom I gave them more than once. I was asked to many charming little supper parties at Sir Arthur Sullivan's, when I was generally turned on to do something, sometimes with my brother George, and sometimes Rutland Barrington was included. There were usually some members of the Royal Family present, who appeared highly to appreciate the impromptu performance, and after one of these occasions the late Mr. D'Oyly Carte came to me and said, "Weedon, seriously, if ever Art should fail, which I hope it won't, come to me and I will give you an engagement on the stage at once."

I thanked him, but told him I had no intention

## AMATEUR THEATRICALS

of ever going on the stage, but I would not forget his kind offer if I should alter my mind.

There seemed to be a run on my imitations, and I was asked out a good deal, ostensibly for the pleasure afforded by my society, but in reality for the purpose of "doing something," and as I always enjoyed these evenings, I have no complaint to make.

Generally in the autumn I used to spend a delightful fortnight with Walter Webb at Malquoits, Ewhurst, Surrey. Here Sir William Magnay and I used to get up amateur performances. Delightful times they were, too. Among the members of our Dramatic Company were the daughters of the late Sir John and Lady Puleston, Miss Wyndham (now Mrs. Spencer Bower) and Mrs. O'Hagan, who is a well known amateur actress! Her husband played a small part, but he was so bad in it that Magnay and I had to give him the sack at once, and I don't think he ever tried to act again. Kincaid, the eminent engineer, was equally bad, and George Spencer Bower, K. C., was worse, if that were possible.

In a drama we were producing, Kincaid, who, thank goodness, only played in the prologue, was the defaulting banker, and when the head clerk, the villain of the play,—played by Sir William Magnay,—had to call him a thief and a liar, Kincaid had to writhe under the insinuations, and show by the expression of his face the agony of mind he was suffering. Not a bit of it; he faced the audience sitting at a table with a quiet and placid smile. I was directing from the front. "Kincaid," I

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

shouted, "for goodness' sake, show agony and despair in your face."

"Yes, yes," said Kincaid, "I think you'll find it will be all right when I get some papers and pens on the table."

He was discharged, and Henry Warburton, the Barrister, put in his place. We had plenty of fun over this. Miss Minnie Wyndham and Miss Bessie Hollingshead were also in these performances. The rehearsals generally took place after dinner, as we were shooting in the daytime or playing tennis.

Frank Holl, who had built a beautiful house in the neighbourhood, kindly volunteered to paint some scenery, and I was his assistant. Walter Webb had in the farmyard a large old barn, which was converted into a theatre. These entertainments were got up for the amusement of the tenants on the estate, who, I must say, formed a highly appreciative audience. I remember on one occasion the laughter was so great when I was on the stage that I became greatly embarrassed, as I could scarcely account for it. I had never heard more laughter in a theatre, and I could n't help thinking to myself if I ever went on the stage and caused such roars how successful I should be. The laughter became so great that at last Mr. Webb rose in the audience and addressed them. He said, "I know how difficult it is to restrain our mirth when Mr. Grossmith is on the stage, but if we don't check our laughter the performance won't be over till midnight."

A burly farmer rose from his seat and replied, "Excuse me, Muster Webb, it bain't Mr. Grossmith we be laughing at, but some one have left the



"WISHES AND FISHES"

*From life-size painting by Weedon Grossmith, exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1884*



## AMATEUR THEATRICALS

barn door open at the back, and all the pigs have got in, and they be almost a pushing of us off our seats."

Then, under the direction of our host, the whole audience rose and chivied the pigs out. But it sadly stopped the action of the play, and the laughter was certainly not so excessive.

These performances were all most enjoyable, to the actors at any rate, and frequently led to business for me, for my work was often instrumental in my getting a commission for a picture. At this time I used to go frequently to my dear old friend, the late Sir John Henry Johnson, at St. Osyth Priory, where "between the shots" I also did a little amateur acting.

I remember a fête they got up in the beautiful Park at St. Osyth for the restoration and heating of the village church, which needed it badly. Oh, the coldness of that church in the winter! No wonder so many of Sir John's guests had a headache or were otherwise indisposed on Sunday morning; any kind of excuse rather than face that cold pew, which had an oil stove giving out about as much heat as an ordinary night light.

The fête was a great success, and Sir John and myself did a little sketch in the Banqueting hall of the Priory. The sketch was an impromptu of mine, descriptive of a visit to a dentist, which I have often done with brother George, who played the nervous patient in his best style. On this occasion Sir John played the patient, and we rehearsed it carefully; and when we played it before a crowded audience, consisting of the tenants and neighbours, it was a

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

very great success. The climax is reached when the dentist, after severe tugging, extracts the tooth from the jaws of the terrified patient, who has rolled on the floor in agony.

When we reached the final situation, Sir John was beyond control; he was so carried away by the laughter that his performance had occasioned that the great charm of acting, the *concealment* of the Art, he had thrown to the winds, and was indulging in the most exaggerated style of a fit up "comic relief." He was making a conglomeration of noises, resembling the braying of a jackass, the bleating of sheep, and the roaring of a bull. This row made the small boys in the audience literally scream with laughter, and encouraged my host to go beyond all limits.

I was leaning over him with my back to the audience, so took the opportunity unobserved of giving him a polite tip that this was the time to finish. "That'll do. Very good! It's the end! It's all over."

"No, no! Not yet," said Sir John. "They're still laughing," and he continued bleating and braying, and varied it with an imitation of a dog and cat fighting. This renewed the laughter. He was clutching me by the arms, so that I could n't free myself from him.

"Let go," I said, "it's over!"

"Not yet, they're still laughing."

"Dash it," I hissed out, forgetting myself for a moment, "shut up," and I at last succeeded in wriggling myself away from him, leaving him lying on his back, braying and kicking his legs in the air.



"THE NEW LORD OF THE MANOR"  
From the painting by Weedon Grossmith. Exhibited at the Institute, 1884  
(The figure is life size)



## MOVING

Finding he was alone, he got up, thoroughly satisfied with his performance, and took two or three calls. He afterwards asked me why I walked away. I told him that frankly I thought there was a limit to exaggeration, a limit which in my opinion he had far exceeded.

"Not a bit of it, my dear Weedon," he answered. "You don't know them down here as I do, they're not so fastidious as your London stalls, we could have continued for another five minutes," and I honestly think he was right. He knew his audience better than I did.

At this period my ground-floor companion at Gower Street, Hugh Barber, the dentist, finding the patients not coming in as quickly as he had anticipated, with my consent sold the remainder of the lease to a very nice lady, Miss Osler, who practically took over Barber and myself with the house, and we became her tenants. Later on she saw a house in the same street which she liked better, and we consented to go with her when she moved. The rooms were larger, but there was a drawback in the shape of a big tree, which being close to the window obscured the light of the back room. The landlord, a bootmaker in the neighbourhood, who owned the lease, said he thought *that* difficulty could be obviated, and mysteriously hinted to me as a dark secret that "something" inserted in the root would kill the tree. "I don't want to kill it," I said, "it only wants lopping at the top; will you lop it?"

"I dare n't," he said, "I dare n't. You forget I own the lease, you must n't speak of such things

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on the Bedford Estate, *but if you lop*, six o'clock in the morning, before anyone is about, is the best time. You 'll want a double ladder, Clark has got one in Torrington Mews, and if you saw him, *he* could do it! But I don't know anything about it and would n't sanction it under any circumstances, you quite understand."

"Quite," I said. I was preparing to move in all my furniture in two or three days' time and wanted the lopping done before I got there. I saw the sportsman with the double ladder in Torrington Mews, and told him what I wanted done, and he agreed to carry it out the following morning. The next day it was n't done, and he called on me very much concerned, and asked me if I had permission from the Bedford Office.

This was rather an awkward question, but I evaded it by saying, "Do you suppose I should do such a thing *without* permission?"

He replied, "No, I did n't think you would, sir."

"Very well, then," I replied, "fire away, get the lopping over early to-morrow morning, as I am moving in at nine o'clock."

He came back again in the evening, looking very troubled and rather intoxicated, and said, if it were possible, he would like to see the permission from the Bedford Office. I said, "I have n't got it," which was perfectly true, and referred him to the Bootmaker who held the lease, knowing that gentleman had just left London for a week's holiday at Yarmouth.

He eventually left, after having some difficulty with the umbrella stand, which seemed in his way,

## FRANK HOLL

and promising to be at the other house at six o'clock the next morning — it was summer.

Next day the Pantechicon vans were outside at eight o'clock, and my carpets and furniture were being taken in to the new house. At eleven o'clock I went round expecting to see the top of the tree lopped off, but it had not yet gone; there were half a dozen men with pulling ropes, they had already cut the tree, but it wanted more sawing, and two men were going up the ladder to finish it off. The long branch was already on the ground. The excitement was intense, and I felt I could n't watch it any longer, it got on my nerves, so I went for a walk and returning again at half-past one, found the work suspended and great excitement among the men in the garden.

Unfortunately the proceedings had been witnessed by the Architect of the Bedford Estate — Mr. Fitzroy Doll it must have been — who happened to be in the next garden, and Clark, *my* man, had been taken off at once to the Bedford Office.

I felt a bit sick, and was astonished, on getting back to No. 82, to find a policeman waiting for me to escort *me* to the Bedford Office, where I was confronted by Mr. Stutfield, the Duke of Bedford's steward. I was highly censured. Clark was crying, and kept declaring he was a ruined man. But I assured them he was entirely innocent. If anyone was to blame, it was myself. My only excuse was that I was unaware it was a criminal proceeding to lop a few leaves off a tree in your own garden. And I assured them for the future I should be very careful before I picked a leaf on the Bedford

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Estate, as I had little inclination to endure the monotony of a lengthened term of penal servitude. These last remarks of mine did n't improve matters, for Mr. Stutfield decided we were not to enter the house and declined to let Miss Osler have the remainder of the lease. I returned to the lopping ground. The furniture movers were mopping their foreheads, apparently exhausted with their day's work. "Have you quite finished?" I said.

"Yes, sir, quite finished; we 've moved everything in and put up the looking-glasses and the brackets; all 's in order, sir."

"Thank you very much," I replied; "you can now take 'em down and move everything *back* to No. 82. Miss Osler," I said, "has altered her mind, she is not taking the house."

They moved everything back and finished at ten o'clock at night. I was n't sorry, and I don't think any of us were. We all had a very great liking for the old house.

Since those days I have become better acquainted with Mr. Stutfield, who has shown me many courtesies in very many ways. As for the tree-cutting episode, he was exceedingly lenient. My friend, Mr. Edward Ledger, lopped a tree in Regent's Park which obscured his view, and was marched off by a policeman to the police station, where he had to remain until he found bail.

I believe in certain houses being lucky to one and certain other houses the reverse. No. 82 was very lucky as far as my work was concerned, and the last year I spent there I must have made over six hundred pounds by painting. And the portrait I

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painted of Sir Philip Waterlow's daughter, which was hung at the Grosvenor Gallery, brought me in several good commissions for portraits of children, and it was on the strength of these commissions that I decided to make rather a bold move and go into a more fashionable district. So, in answer to advertisements I put in the newspapers, I found the ideal house I wanted, and I rented from Mr. Murray Davis, the dentist (another dentist), the entire upper part and basement of his house, No. 65 Harley Street.

## CHAPTER VII

### SIXTY-FIVE HARLEY STREET. DEBTS AND DIFFICULTIES

SIXTY-FIVE Harley Street was a double house with two staircases and a fine studio built out, which ran down the side of New Cavendish Street,—rebuilt in 1910,—with a side light eighteen feet high, which was built and occupied for many years by Ediss, the portrait painter. You may imagine I had to pay a very high rent for this luxurious abode, but it was the ideal place for a fashionable portrait painter, which I was fondly hoping to become. So I argued with myself that in such surroundings I should surely get more commissions and could surely ask a bigger price for the portraits, and this all seemed very reasonable. So, after a little decorating, I got in and started work, but I soon realised that it wanted a lot of money to keep this great place up. This was in 1883. I engaged a most excellent housekeeper, and her husband as a butler and general factotum, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, who remained with me for about fifteen years and have retired now and live on a little farm of their own near Frome, and have called their cottage after my daughter Nancy. They worked things very economically, but 65 Harley Street wanted a lot of

## DEBTS AND DIFFICULTIES

keeping up, and very little was coming in. A largish picture I had painted of a dissipated youth in the George IV period, called "The New Lord of the Manor," was on exhibition but had n't sold. It was n't pretty enough, I suppose. Another large picture, called "Such is Life," of a beautiful little child looking into an empty bonbon, was hung on the line, and attracted a lot of attention, but did n't sell either, though I painted a replica of it for the Christmas number of the *Graphic*. During the previous year I had painted a picture as a commission from Walter Weblyn for the Christmas number of the *Sporting and Dramatic News*.

I am sorry to say No. 65 was an unlucky house to me. The tide of bad luck set in with a vengeance. The pictures were not selling and my commissions for portraits fell through, one after the other. One man, a wealthy brewer, who had commissioned me to paint his three children, backed out on learning that I could n't *guarantee* that the picture would be hung at the Academy. Of course, not being an Academician, I could n't insure its being accepted, and told him so. He put the blame on his wife and assured me he personally did n't care particularly for publicity, but he must withdraw the commission if I could n't guarantee it being hung at the R. A. I replied that although I had generally been hung at the Academy, I naturally could n't guarantee it. He then said he was sorry, and asked me whom he had better go to? I replied, "You apparently want an advertisement, I should go to Willings!" Two hundred and fifty guineas went with him!

The next day came a letter from a gentleman

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postponing the first sitting his wife was going to give me, owing to ill-health, she having been ordered off to the South of France by her physician.

That was the next important commission gone, and during the following three months two more fell through, through the illness of children, (measles) but the expenses of Harley Street still continued.

I had a bit of luck in letting off a portion of the house to a very good chap, Richard Light, a wealthy bachelor, who, poor fellow, caught a bad chill while hunting and died a few days afterwards in his mother's house at Hampstead.

My experience as a portrait painter has convinced me that it is very difficult to please. I am sure this is, and always has been, the stumbling block of other portrait painters.

I painted several middle-aged spinsters whose vanity was appalling. I would paint a lady of fifty who looked sixty-five, and render her on canvas as a smiling young woman of thirty, and would then be reminded that a Mr. So-and-So had said her mouth resembled "Cupid's Bow," so often depicted in the Grecian statues, and a visit to the Museum would help my portrait.

I have generally found that plain women are more vain than pretty ones, and plain men too. I am told that if you are impertinent enough to kiss a beautiful woman on a comparatively slight acquaintance, you may possibly, and very probably, get a freezing rebuff that will teach you not to repeat such a liberty, but she will make no fuss, you apologise, it's over, but if you embrace an excep-



**“SUCH IS LIFE”**

*From life-size painting by Weedon Grossmith, exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1885*



## DEBTS AND DIFFICULTIES

tionally unattractive lady, if she does n't scream the house down or call for the servants, she will refer you to her solicitor to state your income and your intentions — you probably having neither — and she will most likely never forgive you. At least, so my lawyer says; I am, of course, not speaking from experience. In portrait painting, the beautiful women swear that you have flattered them. Ye Gods! If you could only paint some of them so as to appear on canvas a quarter as beautiful as they are in reality, you would indeed have remarkable results. But the plain ones grumble and growl and criticise. Again, sitters are frequently pleased until their friends see the picture hanging on their walls. That, of course, is a good moment to pay the hostess a compliment at the poor artist's expense, and get another invitation to dinner, so they say, "It's awfully well painted, you know, the dress is fine, the roses are positively wonderful, but, my dear Lady Triggs, as a *likeness*, well, it's — er — almost an insult, by Jove, it is." The subject looks down at her plate, smilingly says, "You know *you* are prejudiced in my favour — but — er — anyway, I suppose I *shall* look as old as that some day." "Never, by Jove," he replies, "Never!"

I painted a portrait of a really good-looking American woman of about fifty; her frank manner of speaking pleased me immensely. She said to me one day, "Mr. Weedon Grossmith, you must knock out those lines under the eyes and those hollow shadows in the cheeks, I don't like 'em. I know I've got 'em, but I did n't come to you for THAT. If I had wanted to look as I *am*, I should have had

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a photograph taken. I want this picture to look like I *was*, that's what you're being paid for." I pleased her beyond her highest hopes. Greuze and Reynolds weren't in it. By the time I'd finished she knew I was humbugging on canvas, but that is what she wanted, and she had the sense to say so.

I had a curious experience with one lady whose portrait I painted. The family were all delighted with the result and were full of praise, and compliments were simply thrown at me. It was better than Millais could ever do, and was less than a tenth part his price,—so they said!

The following year they asked me to dinner, and a jolly good dinner it was, and when the ladies went into the drawing-room, my host came and sat next me and in a most confidential manner said, "My dear Mr. Grossmith, my wife was rather reluctant to speak to you, so it devolves on me to be the spokesman. You know how delighted we all are with your splendid picture—*charming*—and it's a striking likeness, but not so striking as it *was*, because when you painted my wife she wore a fringe over her well-formed forehead; now, thank goodness, that kind of coiffure has gone out of fashion, and as you must have noticed to-night she shows her beautiful forehead again, a forehead worthy of the artist's brush. Now, it occurred to us that if she came down to your studio and brought the picture with her in her brougham, you might with a few of your magic touches paint out the fringe and restore the forehead, eh?"

"Delighted," I said, and fixed a sitting for the

## DEBTS AND DIFFICULTIES

following morning. I had had a good dinner and could n't refuse.

I painted out the fringe and worked for two or three hours on the forehead till I got the desired effect, and they were more than pleased, and wrote me a letter of appreciation.

I dined at their hospitable table the following year. Excellent dinner, and as the ladies were retiring the hostess said, "Don't forget, William, what I told you."

I heard him remonstrating with her, then he settled down and filled up my glass with some very good port. He opened up conversation by saying the portrait looked very well. I agreed with him, but he said, "Of course it is n't a woman of fashion, no woman does her hair like that *now*, it's old-fashioned."

"It was fashionable when I painted it," I replied.

"True, quite true," he said; "everyone admires the portrait tremendously, but the simple way the ladies wave their hair over the foreheads now makes them appear to a much greater advantage. My wife said, 'if you could spare a few moments to make a slight alteration' — but there, 'it is n't fair,' I said, 'to waste any more of Mr. Grossmith's time, and anyway, I would n't ask him,' and I told her I most certainly should n't encroach on your good nature any further." He then handed me a very good cigar.

After a pause I said, "Well, I shall be very pleased to have another shot at it, but it's very risky, as the light at Harley Street is very different

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

to Gower Street, it's much higher. However, I'll do my best."

She came, and I worked for four hours on the forehead and had to have another sitting of two hours the following day, as I could n't complete it in the one sitting.

The husband wrote and said the improvement was colossal, it was a different thing. I answered this letter telling him how grateful I was that the portrait was *at last* satisfactory, but reminded him, at the same time, that if in the future the exigencies of fashion demanded any further alterations the best plan would be to allow me some nominal fee yearly to keep the portrait up to date!

Cholmondeley Pennell, whom I used to shoot and fish with, introduced me to Pritchard Morgan, who later on discovered gold in Wales, and Pennell had hinted to me several times that Morgan wanted his children painted, and he had also a very good collection of pictures.

Things were getting so disastrous with me, that at one time I was nearly giving Morgan a hint while driving in his Tandem round the Park, but the excitement was so great watching the horses and wondering what extraordinary equestrian act they would perpetrate next that I postponed my intention and thought I had better leave it to Pennell.

One fine morning, when I was indulging in a brandy and soda to give me Dutch courage to face three gentlemen who were sitting in the hall, declaring they would not leave until they were paid, a letter arrived from Pritchard Morgan saying he wanted to see me purely on a matter of business,

## DEBTS AND DIFFICULTIES

and when would it be convenient for him to pay me a visit? He concluded by saying, "I daresay you know what I want to speak about. I have already spoken to Pennell on the subject, and he said, 'Go to Grossmith, he is your man.' " "A commission at last," I said to myself, and armed with the letter, I faced the duns in the hall. I told them it amounted to a two hundred and fifty guinea commission, and promised them, on my honour, they should be the first to be considered; they shook me warmly by the hand and left me in peace.

I invited Pritchard Morgan to dinner, I still had a small cellar of wine,—which was not paid for,—I did him very well, and after dinner showed him into the studio, where I had two or three pictures on the easels, and had arranged to have a very strong light thrown upon them, the rest of the room being in darkness.

He looked at them and seemed very pleased, and said, "Now, Grossmith, to business."

"Right you are," I replied, lighting another cigar, and ringing a bell for the brandy and sodas. I thought to myself, "I won't stick him too much, but three hundred guineas for three life-size children in a group would not be out of the way," but I was also willing to take much less, in fact, half that amount as things were.

We filled our glasses, and when the servant had left the room, he said again, "Now, Grossmith, to business. This is what I have to say: you know I've got a very fair collection of pictures stored, and as I shall be leaving England soon I am going

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to ask you as a friend, what do you advise as to the best means of disposing of them? Pennell thinks I had better put them up at Christie's; what do you think?"

Of course he was entirely free from blame. He had never given me a commission, he might have thought of doing so, but had never even hinted it to me, but it was a hard knock.

I went about as much as I possibly could, more or less touting for portraits, and making myself particularly agreeable to people of wealth. Much as I should like to have taken the pretty but poor girl down to dinner, she was no good to me. She could n't give me a commission for her portrait, and I was n't laying myself open to matrimony unless the lady had money, and then she would n't have wanted *me*. Things were getting so desperate that I thought at one time of taking a stringent remedy in the form of marrying a lady considerably older than myself and even less attractive, who had a very substantial income. I had had the hint direct that there was a possibility of success in that quarter. There is no harm in my telling this story, I need hardly say I have never mentioned these facts to anyone, and the dear lady passed to a happier land many, many years ago.

I don't think she was much attached to me, but she felt lonely, and I felt poor, with the worst form of poverty. I hadn't a penny and owed a heap.

After taking her to several theatres and picture exhibitions, she lunched with me, and as she was leaving I rather sheepishly said, "I want, some

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time or other, to say something important to you, *very important.*"

"Very well," she answered, "come and spend an afternoon next week with me, and we'll have a long chat. I'll write you," and the next day I received a letter from her.

I accepted an invitation to spend the day at her country house, about fifteen miles from London. I went prepared, and thought it all out in the train. When I arrived about tea time, I wandered round the beautiful grounds with her and then admired the pictures and *objets d'art*, and later sat down to a most excellent dinner, and consumed some first-rate wine. I admit I was guilty once or twice of thinking how much more delightful the surroundings would be with somebody I could really care for. Then I drank another glass and banished the foolish thought with the feeling of a slight lump in my throat of "what might have been." Then, with a hollow laugh, I set to work to make a desperate impression, but there was no need for it. I was playing a winning game, and it did n't matter what card I played, I could win, and win easily.

But before another hour had passed I commenced to see myself in a contemptible position, humbugging this good but rather weak-minded lady into the belief that I really cared for her. I was also selfishly thinking of my own love of freedom, and several times there were long pauses in the conversation owing to my profound thought and abstraction, on which she would say, "What are you thinking of, Weedon?" And to my shame I would reply, "You, dear." Lies! I was thinking what sort of

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a husband I should make under the circumstances, and how long I could possibly keep up the deception.

Presently we arose from the table, and soon afterwards I looked at my watch, and said the time had passed so rapidly that I had no idea it was so late, and wished her good-bye, thanking her for a most charming evening. She came into the hall and held my hand, and looking me straight in the face, said, "Have n't you something that you particularly wanted to say to me to-day, Weedon?"

"No," I said, rather blankly, "I don't think so, not that I remember."

"On our last meeting," she said, very quietly and in deep earnestness, "did n't you tell me that you wanted to say something that was of great importance to yourself?"

It was true. Of course I knew what she meant, but evaded it, and replied, "No, not that I remember — unless it was that I wanted to take you to the Academy next week. Yes — that was it — the 'Academy.'

"Is that all?" she said, "*that's* not important."

"No, but that's all I think it was," I replied, and shook hands with her, and when the door was closed behind me, I ran down the road at full speed lest I should miss the train!! ejaculating as I went, "I'm free! I'm free!"

I got back to Harley Street and then breathed again, and felt ready to face the difficulties and struggles ahead.

In those days I can honestly say I never overdraw my account at the City and Midland Bank (Tottenham-

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ham Court Road Branch) for the simple reason that they wouldn't allow me to, and they were right, too. My balance at the Bank stood at about £6.10, all I possessed in the world, and my debts amounted to over £700—a trifle to many men, but a lot to me.

Through all this dreadful run of ill-luck I did n't know which way to turn. I had several small commissions for portraits which I relied on, and even these fell through, and being a proud man, I did n't go about proclaiming my ill-luck from the housetops or boring my friends with my troubles, and I still hoped that there would be a turn soon for the better.

It's a dreadful experience when your regular tradesman absolutely refuses to let you have anything else on credit and forces you to go elsewhere. You are received as a new customer with the greatest civility, you order something to be made and you are most admirably served. But when you tell them they will receive a cheque in due course, the tradesman hesitates and says, "One minute," and retires to the further end of the shop or into another room. You imagine he has left his pencil behind, and wants to take down your address again.

Nothing of the kind, he has gone into the office to consult a Trade Register. He finds your name in a few seconds, with the comment that you are possibly good for "cash custom" but "no credit," or something of the kind.

He returns and informs you that their firm gives no credit, that the profits are indeed so small that they are obliged to ask for cash down before the

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articles are delivered. You are naturally rather indignant. You say you are not accustomed to be treated in this manner, and that you would n't deal with anyone where you could n't be trusted. The shopman is still most polite, he is very sorry, and opens the door to you and bows you out. "Where next?" you ask yourself. Where, indeed? They all have that book.

My old friend Brandon Thomas, the author of "Charlie's Aunt," was having a rough time of it also in his rooms in Harley Place, Marylebone Road, but not nearly so bad as I was, because I was *supposed* to be well off and had to keep up appearances, and my expenses were very great. Pictures which in the ordinary way I could have sold for £50, I had to take £5 and £10 for. When you go to a dealer and tell him you *must* sell your pictures and must have the money *at once*, he has got you "on toast" and can get your work for any price he likes. In this way I had cleared off my stock in trade, and then I wanted money, lots of it.

My dear, kind friend Frank Holl offered to advance me several hundred pounds, which offer I declined and I would n't listen for a moment to his suggestion. My brother had already assisted me a little financially, but I did n't want to borrow. The more you borrow, the more you may, and I had already borrowed at fifteen per cent from a money lender on my furniture, etc. It was during these vicissitudes that I thought of what D'Oyly Carte had whispered in my ear, "If ever you should fail in 'Art, write to me."

So in strict privacy I had a conversation with

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him on the subject of going on the stage. He said he had nothing to offer at present, but would write to me at the first opportunity.

I confided my intentions of going on the stage to Fildes (now Sir Luke Fildes), and he thought it was madness, when I had conquered all the great difficulties of painting, to throw it aside. I quite agreed with him, but when I told him of my dreadful run of bad luck, and the little I had sold, he said he was bound to admit that if I had another string to play on, it was worth considering. But he still thought it an awful pity, and so have I thought ever since.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MR. AND MRS. DOBREE

**I**THINK managers frequently make a mistake by preceding a three-act farce with a serious piece.

It is supposed to add strength to the farce by force of contrast. But it is hard lines for those members of the audience who have been looking forward to a play that may help them temporarily to forget their troubles and cares, to have arrived at the theatre too punctually and be confronted with a quarter of an hour of a play that deals with misery and death; probably a poor bank clerk, who, to feed his half-starved wife and children, has manipulated the accounts and, fearing detection, blows out his brains as the curtain descends.

A similar experience occurred to me in the early eighties.

My old friend Dobree had experienced trouble and sorrow by the loss of a near relative, and had avoided going to any place of entertainment for nearly a year. But one evening after dinner Dobree confided in me that he would like to go to a theatre again, if he could be sure of a good laugh, and when I suggested Toole, his eyes positively glistened with delight. On the spot, I invited him

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and his wife and his daughter Kate to accompany me — I knew dear, good-natured Toole was always good for a box — and I thought this a very effective and cheap way of returning Dobree's hospitality by getting seats by a method which is termed "on the nod." So this was settled.

Dobree was always a little eccentric and fussy, and said he must insist on his family being punctual. He had been so sad, and Toole was the only man in London who could make him laugh (I was not on the stage then!) and he declared he would rather be half an hour too soon than five minutes too late. With the result, I regret to say, that we *were* half an hour *too soon*, and unfortunately arrived in the middle of a first piece of the class I have referred to in which "The Squire" while out rabbit shooting had shot and killed his little fair-haired boy, and had a long illness and brain fever; the family try to persuade him that it was only a dream, but the scheme fails and he has a most harrowing scene, vividly describing blood on the child's cheek and gibbering at the audience.

This was too much for Dobree, who had been shifting about and grumbling, and he shouted in his short-breathed manner, "Where 's-Toole? When 's-he-coming-on?" The band had commenced to play soft music, generally dubbed by the conductor "Heart foam," and the audience were crying and blowing their noses. The Squire commenced a long dying scene in which the actor requires absolute silence in the audience. "I see 'Angels,'" he observed, "I 'm going to join you, my

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son, your father is coming." On this, Dobree rose from his seat and said in a loud voice, "This-is-most-offensive. Where's Toole? I came-to-see-Toole. Why is n't he playing? It's shameful!"

There were cries from the angry pit: "Sit down," "Dry up, old 'un," "Turn him out, he's drunk." If I could have crawled under the seat I would have done so. We tried to pacify Dobree, but it was no good. He then addressed the pit: "I've-been-very-ill-and came here at Mr. Weedon Grossmith's recommendation for-pleasant-diversion."

Shouts of "Shame," "Order," "Sit down."

Dobree continued: "Where's Toole? Why is n't he playing?" An attendant came up and requested him to be silent, and he again asked loudly "Why is n't Toole playing?"

Dobree said he had been brought to the theatre under false pretences and should complain to the management, and went home by himself, leaving his wife and daughter with me to enjoy Toole's performance.

Dobree, like many others I know, thought he had a fair collection of pictures at Portman Square (chiefly old masters) and prided himself on his ability in "picking them up" for next to nothing, and declared that the picture dealers and pawn-brokers from whom he had purchased them—mostly abroad—were ignorant of the rare treasures they were parting with. After dinner, when the ladies had gone into the drawing-room, Dobree would draw attention to some of his gems in the following manner:

"Now, Grossmith, you know something about

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pictures, you paint yourself. Did-you-ever-see-a-better specimen-of-the work of Sebastian del Piombo, hanging on the left side of the mirror?"

"Never!" I promptly answered. I had had a good dinner and was looking forward to a glass of old port, and Dobree was the possessor of a very fine cellar of port.

"No," answered Dobree, "because you can't see a better specimen. Major Ferguson-has-just told me that-there-is not a better one in the National Gallery." (No one knew better than the Major how to successfully lead up to the tapping of a special bottle of '37 port.) "Well," continued Dobree, "that picture-which I know to-be-worth seven hundred pounds, I picked up at Brussels for three-pounds-ten-shillings and-sixpence."

The Major, while draining the port decanter near him, would exclaim, "Marvellous! You're a great judge, sir!"

Dobree with a satisfied smile would acknowledge the compliment, by saying, "I-think-I-know-a-little-about-pictures."

Harry, the son of the house, from the other end of the table would shout, "Help yourself, Major, and pass the poison!"

"Don't be vulgar, Harry. It's not characteristic of our family," from Dobree. "There's-a-Titian-and there's-a-Moroni, worth-more-than-I-would-like-to-say."

With solemnity the Major, twisting the stem of his empty glass, would utter, "Four figures, I imagine," and with exultant pride Dobree would reply,

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"At least, Major, at least, and-would-you-believe-it, I paid fourteen-pounds-for-the-pair!"

The son of the house again shouted across the polished mahogany, "It's robbery, that's what it is, sir. Robbery! It's not fair, *your* buying pictures."

The father, quite pleased, would retort, "Be quiet, Harry! You're-gesticulating-more-than-is-becoming in the presence-of-two famous connoisseurs, and must-moderate-your-opinions. You-know-more-about-trolling-for-pike-than-the painter's art . . . and silence from-you-would-be-more-becoming."

The son, knowing he had scored a point, would follow up by saying, "Well, the Guv'nor's right, but I still venture to say that for a little private dining crib, like this, I never wish to see better pictures."

"Because you can't, my lad. I have the finest Moroni in Portman Square."

"Or any other Square," snapped out the Major, still twisting an empty glass. "They don't grow on apple trees. That's a great work of art, sir!"

I remained silent, thinking that one follower of Ananias was enough and more than enough in the circumstances. But the son, who I rather suspect was going to do the "borrowing act" the following morning and touch the Guv. for a pony, was determined to be on the right side of the parent, and, seated with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets as he reclined in a comfortable armchair, bellowed across the table, "Well, what I say is this, and correct me, gentlemen, if I am wrong, but I say

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my father is the best judge of pictures in London, and you can take it or leave it. The best, bar none."

To which the Major would tap the table and ejaculate with a "Hear! Hear!" and Dobree, with a heavenly smile spreading over his face, would kindly correct his son, saying, "You must n't be stupid, my lad. By the way, tell-Lambert-to-bring up a bottle-of-the '37-port. The Major-and Grossmith appreciate a good-glass-of wine."

Although I felt heartily ashamed of being a party in any way to the bottle trick, on the other hand it is the worst policy ever to disparage the works of Art in a friend's house, and Dobree had some very good ones also. The collector has to live with his pictures and probably places a higher value on them than they deserve, but he is happy, so why severely criticise them? "Where ignorance is bliss 't is folly to be wise," and Dobree was happy in thinking that he possessed some very fine and rare pictures which he had acquired for a trifle, so I was n't going to undeceive him.

I went down, many months afterwards, to Lawford Hall near Manningtree in Essex, to the Dobrees' country house, to spend Christmas with them. When I arrived the ladies were out driving and I was requested to join Mr. Dobree in the library, who, I was informed by the footman, was "not very well." I found my host in an armchair asleep; he roused himself on my entrance and seemed glad to see me. I said I was sorry to hear he was not well; he denied this assertion and declared he never felt better, but told me he had re-

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ceived a *great shock*. He shut the door and mysteriously informed me he was going to tell me something that he should not tell either to his wife or his daughters, but it was a blow that it was hard to recover easily from.

I felt most embarrassed, and said I was not desirous of knowing any family secret that he did not wish his wife to know. He insisted, and pushed me back into a chair. He then referred to his collection of old masters in the following manner:

"Grossmith," he said, "you know that Sebastian-del-Piombo, and-that-Titian, and the-Moroni, to say nothing-of-the-Holbein that-hangs-over-the-sideboard? You've dined with us-often-enough-to remember them."

"I know them all," I replied.

"Well," he continued, "I-was-desirous-of-having-an-expert-opinion-for valuation-for-insurance, and I succeeded in getting the-best-judge-in-the-world to Portman Square. The great Agnew, who after a rapid-glance at-them said-they-were-all d—d bad copies and not worth-two-pence-a piece."

Being an Exhibitor at the Royal Academy entitles one to an invitation to the Annual Reception. On one occasion being anxious to show some slight hospitality and politeness to a lady—who was a patron of Art—having commissioned me to paint her portrait and also having obtained other commissions for me from her friends—I secured, with considerable difficulty, another card, and invited her to accompany me to the Soirée as it is termed. The lady I speak of was a handsome woman of forty

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who dressed extremely well. She good-naturedly offered to call for me in her brougham, and to drive me home afterwards. We had a delightful evening admiring the pictures and chatting to numerous friends and brother artists whom I presented to my fair patroness, and as we descended to the entrance I caught sight of the President, Sir Frederick Leighton, just bidding good-bye to some important notabilities whom he had seen to their carriage. As he turned he saw me, and said something with his delightful smile, so I boldly asked his permission to present him to my friend, — “Mrs. Millionetti,” we will call her — which greatly delighted her. We then passed out, as her brougham was drawn up and was blocking the way of others. I handed her in and with a wave of the hand said loudly to the coachman, “Home,” and took my seat beside her; but the carriage did not move so I put out my head and almost shouted, — “Home, — did n’t you hear me say Home?” “Yes,” replied the coachman, “but where is it?” I was conscious of the broad grin on the face of Moodie, the grandly arrayed porter at the R. A., as I had to give the address carefully and minutely. The explanation of this incident being that jobmasters do not always send the same coachman to “fetch and carry.”

The following week Mrs. Dobree and myself went by train from Manningtree to a village near Woodbridge to see some pictures that she had heard a farmer had in his old farmhouse, most of which he alleged had belonged to his parents, and some he had “picked up” himself, and was dis-

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posed to sell. Even in those early days I rather suspected the farmer with a taste for pictures, but I thought it does n't do to be too suspicious and I admit looking forward to our little jaunt in pursuit of a bargain.

It is well known that Crome and Constable painted some of their best work in the neighbourhood of Denham Vale, Manningtree, and Woodbridge, and indeed all round that neighbourhood, and judging from the vast number of paintings attributed to these great masters which one sees distributed about in shops and alehouses in Essex one would imagine they grew there. Dobree declined to accompany us, feeling, as he said, "rather tired of pictures."

My hostess was very keen on getting a good Constable or Crome for a reasonable price and exhibited a great deal of excitement during our progress in the train. When at length she heard the porter announce the name of the station "Woodbridge!" she was almost on the point of alighting before the train stopped, and putting her head out of the window shouted to the station-master, "Where are the Cromes and Turners?"

The perplexed station-master asked if Mrs. Dobree was expecting them.

"Not Turner," I said, "let's leave him out."

"I don't think," said the station-master, "any parties have been here of those names."

"Bother Turner," said Mrs. Dobree, "I want to see the Constables at Ifling."

The station-master, still eager to oblige, gazed in the air and then on the footboard of the train and

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said, "Oh yes, madam, pardon. There was one here five minutes ago, but he's off duty now."

I then explained that we were desirous of seeing a collection of pictures belonging to a farmer somewhere in Woodbridge. This he understood, and directed us to The Old Farmhouse, a quarter of an hour's drive from the station. We were received by the collector; whether his make-up was genuine or otherwise I am not able to say, but he wore high gaiters, and an old tweed suit, and looked like the conventional stage farmer. I never saw so many Cromes and Constables in my life. They say Etty's works would have filled Westminster Abbey, and I'm sure this collection came in a good second. It was a very large farmhouse. Every room, including the bedrooms and out-houses, were filled with the works of these great masters.

A small Crome could be acquired for a hundred pounds and a three-foot Constable for a thousand. Mrs. Dobree was inclined to purchase two or three at these nominal prices, but a squeeze of the wrist from me, accompanied by a violent shake of the head, made her refrain from doing so.

I modestly asked this private Essex collector whether the great London dealers knew that he had such a valuable collection, and if so, why did n't he sell to them? For even in those days (1883) a thousand pounds was not a large price for a fine *Constable!* He was very indignant, and replied that he would n't permit a dealer inside his house, and, with a wave of his hand, said he absolutely refused to sell to dealers. He was pleased to sell to

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the gentry, but the gentry only, and the name of Dobree had been known in Essex for some centuries. But noticing that Mrs. Dobree was off buying, he took me aside privately and said:

"Don't spoil things by throwing cold water, and I'll give you thirty per cent commission."

I need hardly say they were very ordinary copies of landscapes, and some slightly resembled the style of Crome and Constable.

The Dobrees used to entertain very largely at one time at Portman Square, and Mrs. Dobree had asked me to a party and reminded me to come pretty early, and told me that her last reception was such a huge success, that the crowd was so great at one time during the evening, that three people fainted on the staircase. I accepted her kind invitation, and as the society papers say, "Everybody who was anybody was there," and "others equally well known."

Mrs. Dobree, bouquet in hand, was stationed at the head of the staircase receiving her guests, and I happened to be near her when the following incident occurred.

I observed a fine array of colour moving along the hall,—it was the arrival of the Chinese Ambassador and his suite,—and being late in the evening a young and inexperienced footman had temporarily taken the place of the butler who had been announcing the guests. The Chinese Ambassador told him how to pronounce the names, but as there were several gentlemen with him the man thought it would be more correct to announce "the Chinese Ambassador and his *Sweets!*"— which he did.

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The same idiot shortly afterwards announced the actor, Mr. Earl Douglas, as the Earl of Douglas, and he was beset by several mothers and their unmarriageable daughters, but on learning he was only *Mr.* Earl Douglas playing a ten-line part at the Haymarket Theatre, he was given the cold shoulder very quickly. It was a very pleasant and amusing evening, and as we were departing, a Mrs. Bradshaw, a lady with corkscrew curls *à la* Leech drawings in the back numbers of *Punch*, pointing to an old gentleman in the corner of the room who was asleep, said to me:

“It’s a funny thing, but I fancy I know everyone here except that old gentleman in the corner. Do you know who it is?”

“Yes, madam,” I replied, “I do. That is our host!”

## CHAPTER IX

### FISHING STORIES

**I**TOTALLY disagree with Dr. Johnson's contempt for fishing, which he sums up as a "worm at one end and a fool at the other." Dr. Johnson knew nothing about fishing and was therefore not competent to express an opinion on the subject. Had he been a fisherman, he might have discovered more pleasure and health on the banks of the silent stream than in listening to his own voice for too many hours at a time in the fetid atmosphere of Fleet Street pothouses.

Byron in *Don Juan* got nearer the truth when he described angling as a solitary vice.

"Angling too that solitary vice,  
Whatever Isaac Walton sings or says,  
That quaint and cruel old coxcomb in his gullet  
Should have a hook and a small trout to pull it."

All sports, I am afraid, are cruel, but whether you are crawling on your hands and knees on the banks of the Rivers Test or Itchin with your light split-cane rod and your tin box of dry flies, stalking a trout, or approaching an old Monastery pond on tiptoe at daybreak in pursuit of carp or roach, there is the element of vice about it — the element of the knave, but not the fool.

What is termed coarse fishing is more or less a

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solitary vice. 'Alone on the banks of a private pond or lake, perfectly quiet, sitting on a camp-stool, or hiding behind a bush watching the tip of a float, so shotted that it is only half an inch out of the water. How still it is! Then a twist, a slight movement, now it travels sideways, jibs, then suddenly disappears. The "strike," the "tang" of the gut line, you have hooked a good two-pounder, quietly, quietly, don't hurry, he shows his silver sides and red fins, get the net ready in left hand, you keep your seat if possible, draw him along, you *have* him, and with a splash you put him in the "keep net" pegged down to the bank. A little more paste on the hook, a little more ground bait thrown in, you are ready again, and all so quiet and solitary. "The Solitary Vice."

Fishing always had a great fascination for me. I commenced at the bottom rung of the fishing ladder, fishing for Minnows and Gudgeon in the Regents Park Lake before the great Ice accident,—and in the Hampstead ponds. I seldom caught anything in those young days, but I persevered. I had a three-jointed sixpenny hazel fishing rod and a penny line. I kept my fishing rod behind a bush in the front garden, for I was not allowed to go fishing in case I tumbled into the water. I used to fish at the sluice house on the New River close to the Seven Sisters Road, a very pretty place, with beautiful fields all round, but all built over about twenty-five years ago.

I also fished in the lake in the grounds of the Hornsey Wood Tavern, which is now Finsbury Park, but I did n't catch any fish there. Sometimes

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at these tea-garden fisheries you bought what was called a refreshment ticket which entitled you, as it said on the card, to "Fish in the Lake," and you could have sixpennyworth of refreshments in addition.

The lake was generally a small muddy pond, containing a few large carp who knew too much to take a bait with a hook projecting.

I had purchased a book on Angling by Robert Blakey, evidently republished by the late George Routledge, whom I reminded years ago how misleading his book might be, for it was still being sold as an up-to-date guide as "Where to fish" as late as 1890. It gives a full account of excellent sport to be obtained in the "West India Docks." "And the private fisheries near Shepherd's Bush, Bayswater, which lies within a sixpenny ride from the Bank of England." It read "that they are fair collections of water, have a tolerable stock of Barble, Roach and Dace, and there is accommodation for refreshments." "Sometimes rod anglers, succeed in taking away five and twenty or thirty pounds' weight of fish." "The names of these waters are Willow Vale Fishery, Victoria Fishery, and The Star Fishery. The ordinary charge is one shilling a day." Imagine an angler, a foreigner perchance, looking out for that "sixpenny" bus, as he stands with all his fishing gear: rods, camp-stool, live bait can, and mackintosh, and eventually getting into some kind of bus that goes to Bayswater, filled with hope and the pleasure of a fine day's sport, directing the conductor to put him down at the "Willow Vale Fishery!"

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These ponds might have been there and open to anglers up to sixty years ago, but for the last fifty years surely, rows of streets have covered those haunts of "Solitary Vice."

"Best's Art of Angling," published in 1804, gives a full description of the most likely places for catching fish on the Thames. It directs you "always to pitch your boat under the wind! That is, if the wind be South, then keep on the Surrey shore; if North, on the London side. The best places for pitching a boat to angle in the Thames are about one hundred and fifty yards from York Stairs. The Savoy, Somerset House, Dorset Stairs, Black-friars Stairs, Trig Stairs and Essex Stairs. On Surrey side, Falcon Stairs; Barge Houses, Cuper's Vulgo, Cupid's Stairs, The Windmill and Lambeth."

"There are very good roach and dace to be caught at Westminster Bridge, if the weather is favourable in the Autumn. The *fifth Arch* on the North side is best to pitch the boat" !!!

Other books inform the hopeful Angler that good sport consisting of "Goldfish and Tench is to be obtained at the Pond in front of Canonbury Tower."

Also the pond in front of Copenhagen House, Islington, the Famous Tea Gardens, where according to Baron Nicholson of Judge and Jury fame, "the water to make the tea for the Company was dipped from the pond, where anglers were fishing for Tench and ground baiting with clay and *chopped up worms!*"

The Cattle Market now stands on the grounds of these famous Tea Gardens. The New River

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in front of the Sadlers Wells Theatre was in his (Nicholson's) day open and free to anglers, and the demand in the neighbourhood was so great for Tackle and Fishing Rods that Carter's Angling Shop was started in a small way one hundred years ago at the corner of the John Street Road; now it is a flourishing business, wholesale and retail.

I have fished in the old ponds at St. Osyth Priory, the late Sir Henry Johnson's lovely estate, where the carp run to ten and fifteen pounds, but you can't catch them; an eel will take the bait while the carp is thinking the matter over. I fished at Shoreham Gardens near Brighton with the same result. All the tea garden fisheries round London have disappeared. I presume the sale of the property for building purposes has paid a better dividend than the "fishing refreshment ticket" ever did.

The Welsh Harp at Hendon and the Lake at Elstree are full of fish. I have caught Perch at Elstree as fast as I could bait my hooks in the old days, twenty years ago, and have taken some decent Jack out of Ruislip Reservoirs in the winter.

Fishing in Reservoirs is always a very uncertain sport. I have fished in many with more or less success, generally less, including the huge reservoirs at Finsbury, Sunbury, and Tring. They all contain very large fish, but as these deep waters are full of small fry of all sorts, there is no reason why a Jack or Perch should prefer a stiff-looking fish for food with half a dozen hooks attached to it when he can easily obtain a live youngster without these dangerous attachments. An old fishing friend of mine,—Alexander Baxter of Somerset House,—

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so excited me over the great possibilities of Lord Rothschild's famous Reservoirs at Tring, where he had obtained permission to fish, that he was ready to bet with me that, besides taking two or three dozen large Perch, I would capture a brace of Jack that would turn the scale at forty pounds. He assured me it was almost a certainty, and my vivid imagination pictured these fine specimens set up in my Hall, with the label "caught at Tring, with single gut line, etc." And indeed, after a second glass of port at Short's in the Strand where we had adjourned to make the final arrangements, he whispered in my ear, it would not surprise *him* if I took a single fish weighing thirty pounds!!!

I could already feel the heavy tug of the line, and as he wished me good-bye he said there was only *one* thing against Tring which applied to all Reservoir fishing, and that was if they should happen to be "pumping," drawing off the water, it frightened the fish, but with great assurance he added, "We need n't trouble about that, as it only occurs once in a blue moon."

I crossed the road to Farlow's and spent a pound on extra tackle.

At length the wished-for day arrived, and, it being winter, the best time of year for getting hold of the big 'uns, I had to be called at five o'clock in the morning. To me a most objectionable hour to be disturbed, but I had no alternative, "it had to be." So I had my bath, a cold one (no hot water being available), dressed and shaved by gas-light. It was certainly *warmer* than the more modern electric light.

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Breakfast I was not inclined for. My supper I had only finished four hours previously in the congenial company of J. L. Toole, Sir Henry Irving, and Tom Thorne, and I was not hungry, but, strange to say, I was thirsty. So, after two cups of tea, no cab being available, I stamped it to Euston Station, where I met my cheery friend, who was full of health and vigour, having gone to bed the previous night at 9.30, and informed me his rest was frequently disturbed by wild dreams, and waking up with a start just as he had hooked a twenty-pounder.

We certainly had a most enjoyable day. There was no pause in the conversation. We "lied" for hours about the fish we had each caught in the *past* and the big 'uns that had broken the tackle and escaped. They are always *so* big when they break the line. The lunch in the punt was excellent; it always is. Never was a pie so good. The hard-boiled eggs above suspicion. And the cheese! Excellent! Where could you get such cheese except at the village inn at Tring? Certainly not in London! The drink which Baxter had provided was beyond reproach, also the cigars, which we smoked at intervals between the pipes. It was indeed a pleasant day. There was only one drawback to our piscatorial outing. "They were unfortunately pumping." Basket, "Nil."!!

Fish are so unreasonable; why should they fast because a few gallons of water are withdrawn from their haunts?

It does n't affect our appetites in times of drought when the water board asks us to economise, but

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then, we are not fish. The Thames I have fished from Kew to Goring, and caught more at Hampton than anywhere else on the Thames; perhaps I knew the swims better there—a very important fact wherever you fish.

The late Heather Bigg—the surgeon—and I used to fish together a good deal at one time, and I introduced him to the delights of the Hampshire Avon at Ringwood, an ideal picturesque country village. I never knew such a famous river for large roach. I have a couple set up in a case which I caught there, one just under two pounds and the other just over. The top weight, I think, for roach.

My friend George Spencer Bower, K. C., joined Heather Bigg and myself on one occasion. He said he would like to stay a day or two at the old Inn, but he did n't care to fish. He agreed with Dr. Johnson on that subject. However we persuaded him to alter his mind, and rigged him up with a rod and line. But Heather and myself were obliged to have a private consultation; we did n't want Bower too near *us*, fishing in our particular swims, and disturbing the fish and doing no good for himself (for he was quite a novice), so we placed him on the bank in a bend of the river, where a few fish have been seen but not often caught, and well away from our happy hunting grounds.

The weather was not favourable to sport; it seldom is. There are always about a dozen obstacles, at least, against your ever catching any fish. The weather is "too hot or too cold." "Wind too strong

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or no ripple on the river, at all." The water "too thick, like pea soup," the angler describes it, or as clear as "gin," both most unfavourable conditions. The wind in the East, or thunder about, too many weeds in the water, or else they are cutting the weeds up stream, and the fish are getting too much "feed" from the insects off the floating weeds. The water is "too high or too low." Always some excuse.

So, with some of these drawbacks against us, Heather Bigg and myself didn't do too well, although we had the only punt on the river and commanded everything.

We picked up a few fish, because we are both fairly expert fishermen, but nothing to speak of, or even to keep, for we threw them back as being undersized. So, having done all we knew with poor results, we punted back to Spencer Bower; we felt rather ashamed, but the lunch basket was in our punt, and we had stayed down stream longer than we intended, and knew he must be hungry.

We fastened up the boat and asked him what he had done.

"Not bad," he replied, "thanks for putting me in such a good place. I don't know whether it's good sport or bad, having had practically no experience in angling, and I don't know the names of the things I've caught." To the amazement of Heather and myself, the first fish we caught sight of was a two-and-a-half-pound grayling, and another nearly as big, about a dozen roach averaging a pound, half a dozen perch, one a good two pounds and a half. It was almost impossible to



THE SLUICE HOUSE ON THE NEW RIVER, HOLLOWAY, N.



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disguise the expression of surprise and disgust and *almost* anger on our faces.

When we had recovered from the shock, Heather Bigg said, "Yes, I knew it was a good pitch, or we should n't have put you there."

And all I could feebly utter was, "*Rather!* I'm surprised you did n't do better!!" We felt pretty sick, and it did n't take Spencer Bower long, with his keen judicial knowledge of men and the world, to discover our feelings.

In this very beautiful stream one autumn I was fishing for grayling on a new system and caught several good 'uns. On the opposite side of the bank an old angler was pulling up big roach one after the other. Presently he came over to me and said, "I can't catch the grayling here; what bait are you using?" (I was not fly fishing.)

I replied, "I will tell you what bait I am using if you will tell me your bait."

"Right!" he said, "this is mine," handing me a mixture of bread and bran.

"And that is mine," I said, handing him identically the same mixture.

If you want to catch big Jack you must fish in the winter and must n't be afraid of freezing. It's the rough, cold, and windy weather that brings the big 'uns to the surface, it sharpens their appetites. That is the time to attach your quarter-pound dead roach to the flight of spinning tackle, and twist the tail so that it spins, but does n't wobble. You have on your leggings over thick boots, and the warmest socks you possess, and over your overcoat it's a good tip to wear a mackintosh, the only thing

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that will keep out the cold wind. The difficulty is to keep warm. I could barely do so, and having succeeded at last in lighting my pipe would make a good cast, gradually drawing the spinner through the water, casting again, the freezing water dripping from the line on to my fingers. You can't wear gloves, though mittens are very effective. My friend Heather Bigg would say, "Weedon, have you got a match?" "Yes!" I replied. This necessitated pulling in my line, and unfastening the mackintosh, then the overcoat and then the undercoat, the matches invariably being in the trousers pockets. I gave him the matches, and by the time I got them back I was thoroughly cold. However, as he had omitted to bring his matches with him, one could n't be selfish. Later on in the day, "Weedon, got a match?" Same business repeated, with the difference that perhaps it's snowing a bit now and the wind coming straight from the East.

The second day we fished it was positively colder. Heather Bigg's pipe had gone out as usual. "Weedon, got a match?"

It suddenly occurred to me he must have brought matches with him or how did he light his pipe,—so I answered, "No!"

"What a nuisance!" he replied, and drew in his line, undid his mackintosh, then the overcoat and undercoat, and at last took out a box of matches.

"Why," I said, "you've got your matches with you."

"Yes," he replied, "but I did n't want to catch cold getting them."

Anglers not only become liars, but they become

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utterly selfish, but never *fools*, as Dr. Johnson dubs them. I have come across anglers who are cads, snobs, liars, knaves, and even thieves, but *never* fools!

Perhaps this is the only exception. In the early eighties I was giving Rutland Barrington some instruction in barbel fishing at Datchet. The ledger used for barbel fishing is a flat lead with a hole through it, which the line runs through freely, and which rests on the ground with eighteen inches of fine gut with a hook attached.

"Keep quiet," I said to Barrington, "don't talk, and don't move about in the boat. The water is horribly clear and they will see and hear everything. On a fine day like this perhaps it is better not to throw out your ledger, making a big splash, rather drop it in gently. "There!" I said, suiting the action to the word. I lifted the ledger with the baited hook, and gently dropped it over the side of the punt. "That's all right," and so it might have been, but unfortunately I had omitted to attach the gut to the running line. So the ledger was gone for good, and I have never heard the last of it from the famous "Pooh Bah!"

George Pacey, a well-known fisherman at Henley, told me that if I wanted a really fine day's sport, I might get it at the end of November, just when the floods were clearing off. He said it's perhaps only for a day or so, but during that time the Pike and Perch are so ravenous that they would snap at your hand if it was hanging over the side of the punt. It's almost dangerous at times.

"If I send you a telegram over night will you

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come down by the six o'clock train in the morning?" he asked.

"Certainly," I said. "There shall be no business to interfere with *that* sport."

I was staying with my brother at the time, and late one evening a telegram came from Pacey, "Pike and perch well on." My brother and I decided to go. We rose before five o'clock, in total darkness. It was too early to eat breakfast—I had been up late at the club the night before. We caught the six-thirty train with great difficulty, and it was just daylight by the time we arrived at Henley, where we had breakfast and then went down to the boathouse. There was the usual fuss in getting all the paraphernalia that coarse fishing involves. (How different to the little tin box of dry flies, and the light thin rod for trout fishing!)

"Have you plenty of live bait?" I asked; the fisherman replied, "If five dozen is enough, then we have." I smiled approval and said, "Give them plenty of fresh water." "That's all right, sir." "Bob, put the can in the river till we're ready to start." "Give me hold of the lunch basket. Thank you, I'll put the beer at the back." "We shall do well if we drink all this whiskey, but I bet we'll wet the first ten-pounder on getting to Wargrave." "That'll take a good two hours against this wind and stream."

The preparations took so long that it was past eleven o'clock before we started, and when we got to Marsh Lock the punt pole, the only one the man had with him, broke, so we had to drift back for another, and we did not get to Wargrave until

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nearly two o'clock. So we had a good lunch, and having lighted a pipe I announced that I was eager for the fray. We were going to fish with the live bait, a very killing method, which I discontinued years ago, considering it too cruel.

"Just give me a lively roach, something to appeal to the palate of the big 'uns," I said, "and one for my brother." We had got our rods and tackle and even the net ready.

A lot of murmuring ensued between the fisherman and the boy. I heard scraps of conversation, such as, "Yes, I did!" "No, you did n't!" "Well, look in the cupboard in the back." "No, there's nothing in the well." "I told you to put it in the boat." "No, you did n't, you said leave it to me." At last I said, "What's the matter, what's up?"

Then the fisherman said, "I'm sorry, but the boy's left the can with the live bait on the bank."

The usual Jam, Ram, and Cram epithets followed; in fact there was a good five minutes' row in the boat, in which my brother and myself joined, till at last Gee-Gee said, "This is doing no good. Can't we put the boy on the bank and let him run home and get the bait?"

"That's no good," said the man. "If he ran there and back it would take him an hour, and it'll be dark by then." It was already getting dusk and beginning to rain.

"Confound it," said I, "we'd better change our tackle and put on a worm, we may get a perch that way."

"I never thought of bringing any worms," said

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the fisherman. "I did n't think we 'd want 'em with all those lively dace and gudgeon."

"Bob, give me a bit of bread and I 'll make up some paste."

Bob replied, "There ain't none; you gave me the last bit, which I ate with the cheese."

"Curse!" I shouted, "what are we going to do?" And the reply from the fisherman finished all the patience we had left.

He said, "One minute, gentlemen, when the fish are on the feed, as they are *now*, they 'll take the naked hook."

"What!" we ejaculated.

"Yes," he answered, "and PREFER it!!!"

I shouted, "Pull up the d——d rye pecks and get home." And thus ended the great day's sport! Since that day I have never left anything to a fisherman or a boy or anybody, but have always seen to everything myself before starting. I think this applies to every enterprise if you want to succeed in it.

I am not going to relate the big catches I have made, or my successes as an angler, and I have been most successful, but merely confine myself to a few, I hope, amusing adventures.

When I was acting at the Court Theatre in "Aunt Jack," which ran all through the summer, I shared rooms at Datchet with Eric Lewis, who was also playing in it. We could get down by the last train. Forbes Dawson, the actor (who, in company with Charles Glenney, was living at Teddington), a very cheery, jolly chap, also very keen on fishing, invited me to "a fishery" (*he called it*) at that place. I

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accepted the invitation and called for him at his little house in the main street there. He was ready to start. "Do we take a train?" I said. "No!" he answered. "Carriage?" I asked. "No, it's just a short distance." I said, "We must get out of the town, surely?" "Oh, no," he said, "here we are." After a short walk he pushed open a green door set in a brick wall, and I found we were in the garden belonging to a fairly big stucco residence.

The *Gardener* met us, and shook hands with Forbes Dawson, calling him "old man." Dawson always had a keen sense of humour.

"Is this Mr. Grossmith? I should like to go to the theatre one night if you will give me some tickets," he said. I realized we were here as the invited guests of the *Gardener*, who said to Dawson he rather wished he had come some other time as it was "a bit risky to-day."

"Come along," said Forbes in true light-comedy style, "let's get to work."

We were going to fish in an ornamental pond about twice the width of an ordinary dining-room and ten times as long. The water was a dark muddy brown and about two feet deep. I felt absolutely humiliated, but being the guest of Dawson (or the *Gardener*) I didn't like to look the gift horse in the mouth and commenced fishing. Dawson had already got to work. Down went his float almost at once, and out came a two-pound barbel. "My goodness!" I said, "I should n't have thought it." Then my float commenced to move and stopped again. Nothing happened for about ten minutes.

Then Dawson shouted, "Here, I shall want a

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net for this, I 've got hold of a four-pound bream." At the same time I heard the wheels of a carriage coming up the drive.

"I 've got him," shouted Dawson most excitedly, at the same time landing a big, splashing bream on the grass. He shouted to the Gardener, who was running towards us, "What price this, my boy, what price this?"

"No price at all, you fool!" was the reply. "I told you so, it's the Colonel! Out you go, *quick*, both of you!" at the same time throwing the fish back in the water, and seizing the rod out of my hand.

"Come on, Weedon, this way," said Forbes, and I found myself in the hateful position of having to scuttle out of the grounds as fast as my legs would carry me, like a common thief who had been stealing apples!—I have since thought that Glenney had already "been there."

A well-known fisherman who had a couple of punts for hire at Datchet whom I used to fish a good deal with, lost his wife, of whom he was very fond, and for a time he seemed inconsolable and depressed. A few months later I heard he was engaged to be married to a cook at one of the houses on the banks of the river. And the next time I fished with him he looked most cheerful, and was well dressed and turned out better than I had ever seen him before. He at once opened the subject of his engagement and told me of the many good qualities of his fiancée, among others that she made splendid cakes.

He said he hoped to get married in a couple of

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weeks, but was afraid he might have to wait a month.

I told him there was no hurry, and it was always a wise thing to be *quite* sure of your choice.

He replied there was n't the slightest doubt about that; in fact, he said, "I like her so much that I often thank the Lord that he was pleased to take my poor dear wife."

To my mind the most skilful, artistic, and fascinating form of fishing is fishing for trout with a dry fly. I have had many pleasant and successful days employing this method of angling.

On one occasion, at the invitation of a well-known City Solicitor, I journeyed to some stream about twenty miles from Birmingham, where we had to spend the evening at a very primitive inn. My host had also invited another guest, a famous "outside broker," who having amassed a huge fortune for himself out of a highly speculative business, was now anxious to spend his spare time in pursuing the "Gentle Art."

We were on the war path early the following morning, and in less than half an hour my host had secured a two-pounder; I say "secured" because I could hardly call his method of capture "angling." He was not throwing a fly, and indeed such a thing would have been impossible with the rod he was handling; it was a short, stiff Jack rod, such as one sees nowadays on the pier at Deal (used by such enthusiastic cod fishers as Hyde and his son Kenneth), and his tackle would have held a Conger, and with a *live* May fly (they were just "up" then), and hiding behind a bush he was dabbing or dipping it in a

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pool where he had seen a fish. Sometimes he had a worm on, and sometimes, I regret to say, a flight of hooks with no bait attached, jerking suddenly and foul hooking a fish. He caught several this way. It was the nearest thing to poaching I have ever seen.

I was thrashing the stream in the legitimate way, and my host's moneyed guest was trying to do likewise. I saw the difficulties he was in, so professed a little instruction. And he confessed to me he had scarcely ever thrown a fly before. He need n't have *told* me this. It was obvious. He could n't work the fly a yard, so I put down my own rod and handled his very fine expensive one and showed him how to work the fly out, and after I had done it several times he tried and in about twenty minutes he not only got the fly out but, to his great delight, he succeeded in landing a small fish. He confided in me that he was tired of making money, but this little success in the "Gentle Art" was "more to him than a thousand pounds!"

After a jolly dinner at Birmingham, where we broke the journey for an hour, we returned to town, and my host and the financier talked rapidly together for some time. I gathered that the broker had some business trouble and he was instructing his lawyer for his defence. Later on, when they had finished their conversation, my host went to sleep and I talked to my pupil of the Piscatorial 'Art. He told me he thought of renting a trout stream and wished for my advice, which I gave him; then I turned the conversation to finance. I thought to myself, "This gentleman might be able

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to give *me* some sound tip; and instead of contenting myself with three or four per cent for the little money I might save, I might invest it on his block A and B principle and DOUBLE the capital (should I ever be free of debt again,) according to the promising announcement I had seen advertised by a famous firm. So I suggested that I should look him up one morning and learn something about it. His reply staggered me:

"No, you lunch with me, my lad, when you're my way and we will have a bottle of the best and a chat about fishing. You've been very good to me," he continued, "you've taught me to throw a fly and put me on the right road. And I'm much obliged to you and, in return for your kindness, I'm going to put *you* on the right road. Don't you invest any of your money in *our* business. Stick to what you've got and leave my system alone."

I have had excellent trout fishing at Tillingbourne Park, in company with the late Frank Holl; also at Luton Hoo Park, which abounds with big Jack; also at the late Colonel Goodlake's at Uxbridge, where the river is alive with trout; also in the Lambourn at Newbury and on Loch Corrib. Loch Conn contains enormous Pike, thirty and forty pounders. By the way, they are always called Pike in Ireland and Jack in England.

While fishing on Loch Corrib, my friend Willie Stone caught one of twenty-five pounds, and I HELD one of nearly forty pounds, for fully ten minutes, but the water being so deep (over sixty feet) and there being so many currents, the line slacked for a few minutes and the fish was off. I know of no

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

sensation so hatefully disappointing, after a tremendous run, and the sharp tugs nearly pulling the rod out of your hand, suddenly to find it *slack!* For the moment everything in life has gone, and as you stand holding your rod, with a long, loose line hanging in the water, you feel such an ass. And it does n't make things better when your friends suggest that you should have kept your rod more upright or you did n't keep your line sufficiently taut. The fish has *gone* and that's enough, and it does n't improve matters when your friend irritates you still further by saying, "Never mind, old chap, console yourself by thinking that what is *your* loss is the fish's gain."

## CHAPTER X

### BARGAIN HUNTING. ANTIQUE FURNITURE

TWENTY-FIVE to thirty years ago, picking up old glass, china, prints, and furniture was confined to a few artists and connoisseurs, who bought them because they knew they were picturesque and in good taste or for their quaintness. They did n't buy them because it was the fashion; it was n't fashionable then. They didn't buy them from a commercial point of view, to watch the rise in the market, and then sell. They simply bought them because they appealed to their artistic taste and nothing more. They had the courage of their opinions, although they were regarded by the majority of people as "cranks." Oh! don't I know that self-satisfied grin on the faces of the ignorant and the unenlightened, who regard you as a crank and feel sorry for you, and years afterwards purchase *copies* of the class of furniture they have ridiculed and of which *you* own the original?

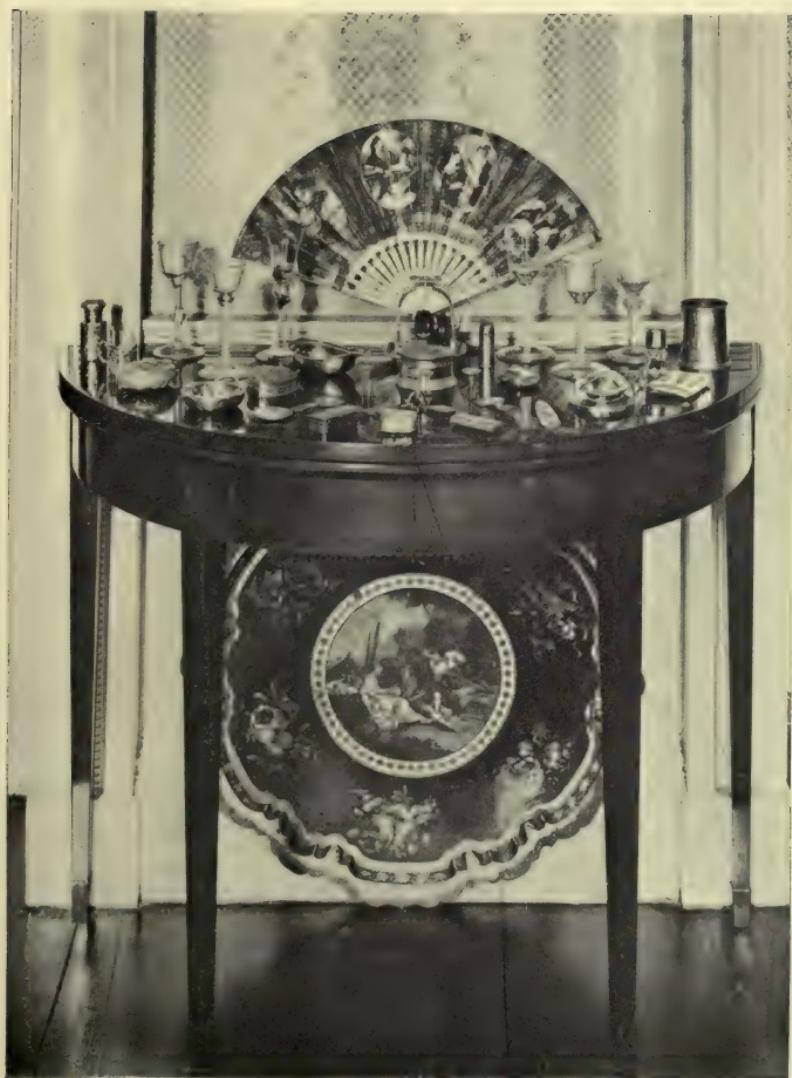
I commenced to "pick up" very early. I have bought beautiful pairs of brass candlesticks from rag shops, when, on asking the price of the shopkeeper, he would put them in the scales and weigh them and charge me for the price of old brass — about sixpence a pound. I have bought numerous

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old candlesticks, knockers, and a beautiful old candle chandelier at Olney in Buckinghamshire. The local ironmonger bought all the candle chandeliers when they introduced gas into the church, and I happened to be painting at Olney about five years after he secured them. He told me he had great difficulty in disposing of them, and was glad to get rid of the last, as they took up so much room in the cellar. I don't know where you can buy old brass candle chandeliers at *sixpence a pound now.*

How changed it all is! Every town you go to now contains "Ye antique shoppe," and when you see that written up, you may be perfectly sure it will be filled with modern brass from Holland, and equally modern badly stippled miniatures from Birmingham; Nelson and Napoleon and some famous beauties with white wigs; over embellished snuff-boxes, and a complete set of Wheatley's "Cries of London" (from Germany), some exceptionally black "oak settees" and chairs with the date carved on them so that there can be no doubt of the period; thickly carved bogus Chippendale chairs, also very black and shiny, and in the corner a palpably modern grandfather's clock, with movable sun and moon effects; a dozen old English wineglasses, very tall and out of proportion, with the ribbon twist of pink or white down the stem, fresh from Stourbridge, and a couple of very old sundials on stone supports from Shaftesbury Avenue (fourth floor), also the latest copies of Lustre, Jugs and Tea-sets from Stafford and Shrewsbury.

Thank goodness, there were none of these shops



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when I used to "pick up" bargains. It was the ordinary broker's shop with the old and the new mixed, and as the wealthy and so-called smart set or "carriage folk" were not buying, we had it all our own way, or very nearly so — not quite all our own way, because we had n't the money to buy them, cheap as they were.

It is a most curious fact, until your eyes become educated, how you miss seeing things. You may walk down a back street in Bloomsbury or Westminster and notice nothing in the houses; you notice the unwashed children playing in the roads and running into the doorway of a rather poor-looking house, but you don't notice that *doorway*. But later, when you become interested in old houses and pass down that same street, you stop at that doorway, and rave over the grandeur of the proportion, and fine composition of the design round the architrave of the door, and see many beauties in this early Georgian house. So it is that thousands of wealthy people passed the little shops that contained the finest specimens of old furniture, and would n't have purchased anything at any price. They did n't *see* them.

I had my eyes first opened by Mr. Brooks, whom I have already alluded to, who occupied the front room in Fitzroy Street, where I had my first studio. He had a few Chippendale and Hepplewhite chairs which he raved over, and enlightened me on the subject, so that when I went to Olney to paint with my friend C. E. Marshall I was on the "look out." Marshall was n't sympathetic with me about mahogany furniture, it was n't old enough for him, he

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

was for old, *very* old oak, and furnished his studio with some of that ancient stuff from Wardour Street, and a servant, in her eagerness to clean and polish one of the cupboards, polished off its antiquity, and left the light-coloured pitch pine underneath.

At Olney I was painting a little picture of a girl lace-making, sitting in front of an open fire, and her brother, who had been chopping wood in the garden, came in with a long piece of carved mahogany in his hand, which he was going to put on the fire. I took it from him and saw it was the arm of an old chair. "Where is the rest of this?" I said.

"In the garden," he replied. "I'm just going to chop it up."

"No, you don't," I said; "bring the rest in," which he did, and produced a finely carved Chippendale armchair in quite good condition, minus the seat, which had been stuffed with horsehair and had broken away from the brass nails. I had great difficulty in persuading the people to let me buy it for seven shillings. They said it was worth nothing, and the only offer they had had was sixpence, and as I had, so they said, been so good to them in many ways they wanted to give it to me. This, of course, I declined and paid them seven shillings, which they most reluctantly accepted, saying they were robbing me. The chair cost about £2 to do up, and I assure you it's worth a lot more than £2 to-day.

In those days old furniture was called "old rubbish," that's what we asked for of a farmer or broker. "We are artists, have you got any old rubbishy chairs or tables with carving on them that

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you want to sell?" If they had n't chopped them up for firewood, they looked about and frequently brought something from the back yard or out of the wood cellar. I don't say they were the specimens that came out of palaces, certainly not. The class of stuff that generally comes from a palace finds its way back to another palace of modern build.

While staying at Olney, my friend Marshall and I got a tip that a grocer at Lavendon had a lot of old rubbish in a loft, so we got Mr. Penny, the landlord of the cottage we were staying at, to charter a horse and cart, and we started off one beautiful evening in May on a most enjoyable jaunt.

The seating accommodation in the cart was very inconvenient until I picked up an old chair at a wayside Inn, which, having paid a few shillings for, I placed in the cart and sat on.

When we arrived at the grocer's — who was also a broker in the neighbourhood, in a small way — Marshall commandeered an oak settee, and I spotted an oak bureau at the back of the shop with an inlaid star on it. There was only candlelight in the shop, but the light was quite good enough for me to offer twenty-five shillings for that bureau, which was readily accepted. So we pushed it up into the cart. The grocer said he was too busy himself (he selling pennyworths of candles) to come with us, but if we liked to go out in the yard and had no objection to climb a ladder, there was a lot more rubbish of sorts in the loft of the barn. Did n't we rush for it! Marshall got up the ladder first, I after him, and he nearly fell backwards as a lot of fowls flew out in his face. We got inside, followed by Mr. Penny

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our landlord, who had struck a match and lighted a candle.

"Look there," I said, "half a dozen Chippendale chairs, carved backs and fluted legs." I agreed that Marshall ought to have first offer of these, as I had collared the chair from the public house and the bureau. So we got them down the ladder, but not before I had spotted a wheat pattern Hepplewhite divan chair for a sovereign. What sport finer than big game shooting! I think Marshall got the chairs for eight pounds (now they are worth £15 apiece). We put them all in the cart and eventually got home, Marshall and myself having to walk nearly all the way, as the cart was so crowded. We stopped at a lonely Inn, where our landlord prophesied we should most likely meet an old farmer he knew who had several carved "chesties."

Sure enough, there was the farmer, seated in an old recessed fireplace, smoking a long clay pipe. So, after our landlord had greeted him in the usual manner, he introduced us to him by saying, "These two gentlemen are artists and would like to see some of your old rubbish up at the farm."

"What rubbish?" the old farmer sulkily answered.

"Why," continued Mr. Penny, "your old carved tables and old 'chesties'; these gentlemen would like to buy them to paint, and afterwards we could chop 'em up for firewood if they took up too much room."

The old farmer looked very steadily at our landlord and answered him very suspiciously. "You

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don't want to chop up those old carved 'chesties,' Mr. Penny! You don't want 'em to chop up!"

Penny, fairly equal to the occasion, said, " Maybe we might chop 'em up or maybe we might n't, but that old rubbish is only fit to chop up, and if these gentlemen bought them for the price of firewood, it would go towards you're buying some nice new, useful furniture."

The old farmer, getting very irritated, snapped out, " You don't want to buy my old carved 'chesties' to chop up, and you know they're not rubbish; you know better than that, Mr. Penny, anyway these gentlemen do, and when you say you want to buy 'em for chopping up or painting 'em, you're lying, that's what you're a-doing! You're lying!!!"

Mr. Penny tried to change the subject by suggesting that the farmer should have a drink with him, but the old man declined his offer, saying he did n't wish to drink with a *liar!*

It was very hard on our landlord, for although he was n't prompted by us, he was doing his best entirely on our account.

The truth always pays best in the long run, even with bargaining. So I confessed to the farmer that we did not want to persuade him to sell his carved "chesties" for the purpose of "chopping up," but it was perfectly true we painted old things as well as young, though in the living model we preferred them young. But we loved the old (in furniture) better than the new, and whatever Mr. Penny had said which had caused annoyance, I felt that we were entirely to blame, as he was only trying to do

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us a service. Commissions then were as unknown to us as they were to our landlord, and I apologised for having been indirectly the cause of hurting the farmer's feelings, and at last succeeded in pouring oil (fusil oil, the whiskey was near) on the troubled waters.

So we buried the hatchet and accompanied the farmer across half a mile of meadow to his fifteenth-century house, where we saw carved oak furniture which, if put up at Christie's, would make Partridge or Duveen jump into three figures at the first bid.

The dear old farmer was most hospitable, but I wished later he had conducted us back to the inn, for, not knowing the way, unfortunately we were unaware there were any ditches until we were scrambling out with curses loud and deep. However we eventually arrived home with our bargains safe and sound.

I have mentioned a few bargains we secured, but not the many we missed. I can never forget the really fine things we saw and knew little or nothing about, things that would now fetch twenty, thirty, or fifty times the amount I was asked then, but my means were so limited, and I had only a few pounds to spare, and sometimes not that. I remember Chippendale tables and magnificently carved mirrors at dealers' shops that one could have purchased for seven or eight pounds which are almost priceless now, and I am bound to say I then thought the price asked was very high. I was only in my infancy as a collector and knew very little,—I purchased by *instinct*.

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I think it was in about '82 that I was painting at Lymington in Hampshire, when the contents of a magnificent old house, Wallhampton, belonging to Lady Paul Burrard, had been sold, and a small dealer in the main street of Lymington had purchased a few pieces of furniture, which he evidently could n't sell. The shop contained chiefly bedding and mattresses. Some wax fruit under glass shades, a bow and some arrows, a harp, and a Japanned coal scuttle, with a painting of grapes on one side, and a view of the Tower of London on the other, several Windsor chairs, a deal table, and kitchen utensils were outside the shop on the pavement, and among this poor-looking stuff was a *very fine* Chippendale armchair with claw and ball feet of very fine proportions.

I don't know how long it had been there before I came, but I had looked at it every day for a month, but could n't afford the price which the dealer asked, namely, three pounds ten shillings! It came from Wallhampton and was in magnificent condition, not a chip anywhere.

The neighbourhood of Lymington, as most people know, abounds with fine estates, and as I walked, with my two canvases together, face to face, and small fold-up easel under my arm, I met carriage after carriage occupied by jolly, happy-looking people, a few of whom I knew slightly, and returned a bow as well as I could with both hands full, but the majority I did n't know, except perhaps by name. These well-to-do people passed that chair daily and saw it, but there was not one who wished to possess it. The day before I left Lymington I

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heard that I had had the good luck to sell a picture at one of the Exhibitions for ten pounds, and I indulged in the extravagant delight of buying that chair, which a dealer some ten years ago offered me seventy pounds for, and it has recently been valued at a *much* higher figure.

I picked up many a good thing for years after this, but about thirteen or fourteen years ago the mad rush commenced, and during the last seven or eight years everyone seems to be trying to get a "bit of the old," and as the majority have not studied the subject, they get taken in.

The year following my lucky purchase at Lymington a dealer took me to see some chairs that an old lady had had in her family for one hundred years; they were very good, but nothing out of the way, and the old lady did n't wish to sell them, she said she hoped they would last out her lifetime. That was quite sufficient for me, and nothing would have induced me to persuade her to part with them; that kind of bargaining I regard as cruel and selfish.

But the dealer had no conscience; he knew I was prepared to pay a decent price, for in that year, '83, I was a bit better off — not much — and was also badly bitten with the craze. He almost threatened the old lady. I apologised for his behaviour and my intrusion, and in quite my best style wished her good afternoon.

The dealer was very much annoyed, and kept on saying, "What does it matter what she sits on? I can let her have something far more comfortable than them," and so on.

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I replied, "She doesn't wish to sell and that is sufficient."

"Very well," said the dealer, "I'm bound to get 'em; she'll never go through another winter with a cough like that, and then they're mine and I'll let you know at once. I'm bound to have 'em."

I went to Lymington two years after and was glad to hear the old lady was in better health than she had been for some time, but the dealer, alas, had been dead for more than a year.

When I was at Whitby in '93, I went into an old shop where at one time very fine things could be found, but the rush had already commenced and the demand was greater than the supply, which was sometimes being made in the winter months—I mean the supply.

There were two ladies in the shop—who were staying at the Vicarage—who seemed rather keen on an oak cabinet. I spotted it, and "gave it a miss" at once. I saw it was a "wrong 'un," and had no interest in it, my attention being directed towards a small mahogany cupboard in the corner of the shop, and although some distance from these ladies it was impossible not to hear their conversation.

One said to the other, "He wants twenty pounds for it; of course these people don't know the value, dear, it's worth sixty pounds at least."

I strolled over towards the cabinet, and one of the ladies said to me, thinking I wanted it, "That's sold, sir,—that is—I—er—asked first, you know, we've got the refusal."

"Quite so, madam," I replied, "I don't want it."

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The dealer entering the shop at that moment, the lady said, "I'll have that old cabinet. Let's see, how much did you say it was, twenty pounds? That's rather too much! Won't you take eighteen?"

"No, madam," he replied, unmoved, "the price is twenty pounds."

"Very well, thank you," as she paid the money, "please send it up to the Vicarage. I'm staying there. Good morning."

When they had gone I said to the dealer, "That's not quite cricket, you know, that cabinet is not an *old* piece."

"*I* never said it was," he replied; "*she* said it was old, I didn't say it was, and as she thinks she knows a good deal more about antique furniture than I do, it's not my place to put her right. We're not here to teach people. She thinks it's worth double the price she has paid, therefore she's trying to get the better of *me*, and she thinks she has succeeded."

"There's something in what you say," I replied, "but the poor lady is now landed with a brand-new antique."

"And it's not so new as that, sir," he answered, and calling out to a boy in a workshop at the back, said, "How old is the Tudor Cabinet, the one we put together out of the chests?"

The reply came, "We've had it for a long time, we made that the Christmas before last."

"There you are," he said with a grin. "It's not so very brand new, is it?"

'At the present time to my knowledge Commer-

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cial Travellers call at "Ye Antique Shoppes" with their samples of newly made "*old*" goods and I know of several old fashioned behind-the-times but *honest* dealers who will *not* buy the stuff which is turned out by the ton to delude the public.

## CHAPTER XI

### “FAST” LIFE IN LONDON IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES

Oh, I was like that when a lad,  
A shocking young scamp of a Rover:  
I behaved like a regular —  
Now that sort of thing is all over.

*Old Ballad.*

**I**FREQUENTLY observe that whenever one's friends go to a place of entertainment, or otherwise, that is not generally considered reputable, they invariably say they were *taken there*. They seldom have the honesty to admit that they had a desire for low company or a wish to witness a degrading performance, so they say they were “taken there.”

In this year of grace, 1912, we are supposed, as a nation, to have improved in our tastes since the eighties.

Have we? To-day we can witness at our leading Music Halls a girl holding by her *teeth* a trapeze from which hangs another woman. We can see splendid lions and tigers tortured into a state of partial submission and working a see-saw, and we can also see them brutally hit if they fail or disobey their trainer. We are invited to applaud a company of sea-lions giving a marvellous juggling entertainment on a dry and dusty stage, the poor creatures

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being in such a ravenous condition the while that their owners and trainers are obliged to feed them during and previous to each item of their turn. We can see a couple of tired pugilists who are paid a large sum to half kill each other, and many more such disgusting and degrading spectacles, which are pretty sure to draw enormous audiences, but some few among the spectators have a sense of shame, and when asked if they have been to see "so and so" reply, "Yes, I was *taken* there."

It's surprising how many people go to places of so-called amusement under compulsion (according to their own showing), or is it a sense of duty which allows them to be "*taken*" to such places, so that they may know what to warn others against?

I, personally, have a conscience, so I say that I was "*taken*" to Cremorne Gardens in 1877 by some of my fellow-students at the R. A. My first visit was also my last, as the famous gardens closed on that eventful night and never re-opened. Cremorne Gardens, situated in the extensive grounds of Cremorne House, the suburban residence of Lord Cremorne, were given over to the public for their amusement and recreation. A portion of the gardens was owned originally by Dr. Hadley, the son of a well-known bishop.

The numerous complaints to the local vestry and to the police, of the rowdyism in the neighbourhood and the noise of the fireworks, eventually closed these famous grounds, and shortly afterwards rows of stucco villas were put up by the speculative jerry-builders and were occupied by more—or less—respectable people.

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My fellow-students and myself drove to this notorious haunt of pleasure and noise in hansom cabs, four or five of us inside one cab. I forget whether there was also a fare outside; there frequently was in those days, apparently quite happy and occasionally drinking something out of a bottle.

I remember distinctly how we got there, but my memory is a little defective as to how or when we left. I *think* I accepted the hospitality of a fellow-student who lived at Chelsea, which was a very long way from Hampstead, and told my parents the next day that "Mr. Pilkin, the Royal Academician, had kindly asked me back to his house at Norwood to dinner, to see his pictures, and forgetting the time, I had missed the last train and so my host had kindly put me up for the night." That was what I told my good people at home, and my unsuspecting parents, never for one moment thinking I differed from George Washington, swallowed the lie like milk, and furthermore, expressed a most earnest wish that if ever again I was privileged to be asked to Norwood by so important an artist as "Mr. Pilkin," I should stay the night there rather than attempt such a long journey home so late "by myself."

I quite agreed with them, and obeyed their wishes on many subsequent occasions. These prevarications later on nearly got me into serious trouble, for my parents, remembering the alleged hospitality the Academician had extended to me, to my horror invited him to dinner, but could n't discover his address in the directory and asked me for the name of the house at Norwood.

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For a moment I was dumfounded. There was no Academician named Pilkin living at Norwood, and I had never *been* to Norwood except to the Crystal Palace. A brilliant idea struck me. I told them my kind host *never* went out to dinner. In fact, he could n't; he was *lame*, an invalid. That 's why he liked people to go to him, because he could n't go to them. My reputation was saved, and I visited the alleged invalid frequently afterwards!

All I remember of Cremorne Gardens was that they seemed to me to be very beautiful, with many fine trees and everything brilliantly illuminated with gas jets and coloured Vauxhall lights, and a large circular platform, on which couples danced to a fine band.

I was once at the Argyll Rooms (now the Trocadero Restaurant in Shaftesbury Avenue), which closed in 1878. I thought the Argyll a respectably conducted dancing place, but rather dull, as "fast life" frequently was in those days.

There used to be several bars in the Haymarket that were supposed to be "fast," the "Blue Posts" and the "Burmese." The latter remained open later than the other places, because they were only *supposed* to sell coffee, but *sub rosa* you could get a glass of cherry brandy if you knew "Mrs. Barnes," a handsome woman, with fair hair, who generally dressed in Cambridge blue satin. The Burmese was a very solemn affair. To give an air of fastness to the place, from the ceiling of the bar parlour were suspended some coloured glass globes of red, purple, and green. Persons of both sexes would sit round the room in almost total silence, and every now and

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then the police went through the farce of marching in and out of the premises to see whether there was any rowdyism or "drinking after hours." Sometimes, to break the silence, someone would observe that it was a fine day; another with equal courage would reply, "Indeed it *has* been, but it was *wet* yesterday."

On one of these mournful occasions I was in the company of Herbert Beddington and his cousin Frank, a very lively young gentleman, almost a boy, and the latter, recognising some friends who had just entered, shouted at the top of his voice, "What ho! Come in and join the prayer meeting." So deadly respectable was this midnight gathering of ladies and gentlemen that the fair "Mrs. Barnes" said to me, "If your friend can't behave himself, he had better go out."

I pretended to be shocked at his conduct and told her I had never known him to behave so before, and I drank her health in cherry brandy. I have tried to dance the Caledonians at Rosherville Gardens, but my attempt was not a success.

"Weippert's," "Henry Mott's" in Langham Street, the "Pic" (Piccadilly Circus, where the Piccadilly Tube station is now), and "Kate Hamilton's," a gambling saloon in Jermyn Street, flourished long before my time.

But in the middle eighties there were numerous lively clubs started in London — the Corinthian in St. James's Square, the Gardenia in Leicester Square, the Waterloo, and Regency in Waterloo Place, the Palm in Oxford Street, and the Percy Club in Percy Street off Tottenham Court Road.

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These clubs were not *difficult* to become members of, though you had to be properly proposed and seconded; this was frequently accomplished, so said a famous wag who drew for *Vanity Fair*, by the aid of the Hall Porter as proposer, and a cabman as seconder. There was a big dancing club in the Upper Street, Islington, called "The Sporting and Dramatic Club."

I was not a member, but I was "taken there" ten years later, one night, by an honorary member, Mr. Tom Heslewood.

There was a band playing "After the Ball," the latest waltz at that time, and the floor was positively bending and swaying with the crowds revolving on it. It was a crowd of all sorts and conditions, though they might possibly have been honest and fairly respectable.

I asked the porter at the entrance (he had a black eye and a portion of his lower lip was torn away) whether any of the shining lights of the turf or the dramatic profession were represented. He replied, "I don't know, I'll look." I said, "Is Lord So-and-So here to-night, whose horse won the Gold Cup at Ascot?" He replied, "I'm not sure, is he dancing?" I said, "I was n't sure, either." I said, "It being a Dramatic Club, of course you have all the chief actors here?" "Oh yes," he stammered out, "mostly." "Is Irving here?" "Who?" "Irving," I replied, "the great actor." "No—no," he answered, "I don't think he's here TO-NIGHT. I'm almost sure *he isn't*." As if there might be some doubt. "Is Toole here?" I asked. "Toole—no," he answered. "He—oh, he's *just gone!*"

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I need hardly say the late Sir Henry Irving and J. L. Toole had never heard of the Club, until, much to their amusement, I gave them a graphic description of what had occurred on the evening I was "taken there."

My young friend Frank Beddington in those days was not allowed a latchkey, and his people were generally under the impression that he was in bed and fast asleep by eleven o'clock, whereas I have often met him at some of these Clubs to which I have been "taken" at three in the morning. Frank would flourish a huge iron key of the old-fashioned type, weighing about a pound, which he called his "Latchkey." It was the key of the kitchen door of his father's residence, which by some arrangement with the butler he had commandeered, so that he was able to come home with the milk and get in by the kitchen entrance. He is like myself now, a respectable married man.

Very many years ago I was careering up Waterloo Place in the small hours in company with some very festive modern "Scowers" or "Mohocks" and in the thick of a promenade of sorts outside the Raleigh Club there was a sudden halt and a push, and a dozen people went down. Unfortunately for me, I was about the first to fall, and on the top of me were about half a dozen ladies, some of them smothered in cheap dyed furs. The pressure against my face nearly suffocated me, there was a horrible row of swearing and cursing, and when I eventually struggled to my feet, I found I was nearly choked with fur, my mouth was full of it. I, poor wretch,

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had done *nothing* and whilst I was standing, spitting and spluttering, trying to remove the fur from my mouth, about half a dozen *ladies* smacked my face and knocked off my hat, and while I was trying to expostulate on the injustice they were measuring out to me, a constable, without making any inquiries, seized me by the scruff of my neck and rushed me along to Marlborough Street, treading on my heels as he went.

Knowing what bad policy it is to bring a charge against a policeman—for under such circumstances the case will be remanded and probably reported, and instead of being fined four or five shillings only, you will be fined considerably more for doing nothing—I thought it wiser to apologise to the constable for giving him so much trouble, and I earnestly expressed my regret and handed him half a sovereign. He took my name and address (I was always ready with a false one), accepted my apology *and* the half-sovereign, and growled out the following advice, that "I had better get home as quick as I could and not go about insulting people!!!"

One night I had been dining with some friends in Cavendish Square and stayed until the very last, a bad habit of mine then. The tired host was yawning, though obliged to look cheery and offer another cigar, while all the time he was wishing me at Timbuctoo. I noticed I was boring him, so wished him good-night and the door was quickly shut on me, and the lights turned out in case I should alter my mind and return. I proceeded to walk to my home, 65 Harley Street.

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I hadn't walked far before I observed on the opposite side of the Square, near Harley Street, a lady apparently in great distress, who had just alighted from a four-wheeled cab, and I heard her say excitedly, "Dreadful cabmen!" etc., etc.

She was dressed in white satin, and was pulling a cloak round her shoulders as if she were cold. She was of medium height, had very golden hair, and was exceedingly pretty.

Being an artist, I confess I was attracted by her appearance. I was also desirous of assuming the air and manner of a modern Lancelot, and come to the rescue of a beautiful lady in distress. So in my best manner I approached her and raised my hat, and asked her if I could be of any service to her?

She explained with indignation, in a pretty, but somewhat affected voice, that the cabman refused to take her any further. She told me she had been to a ball, and in a great crowd had lost her chaperon, and was now stranded in the centre of London and was a stranger in the neighbourhood. She said her parents lived at Highgate, and putting a lace handkerchief to her eyes, which were full of tears, she wondered "what her people would think had become of her!"

I was greatly moved by her remarks, and I confess to placing my arm partly round her waist — in the way of support, naturally — and as she raised no objection I remained in the same rather pleasant attitude, while she endeavoured to suppress her sobs, and I swore that I would find a cab for her if I had "to scour the Metropolis." She whis-

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pered that I was "indeed a gentleman" and took my arm, and we walked some yards in silence; the only sound was the clattering of her rather high French heels on the pavement. There was no other cab in sight, and I felt not a little embarrassed, but also somewhat pleased.

I stopped to replace the chiffon which had fallen from her head, and raising her pretty eyes, she thanked me with a sweet smile, and *again* "wondered" what her people would think had become of her!

I said, "Sweet one, *your* loss is *my* gain, and I feel selfish at the privilege accorded me of being your escort, and if the worst comes to the worst I 'll ask you to take temporary shelter in my house in Harley Street, close by. And while I am searching for a cab, my housekeeper, whom I will ring up, will get you a cup of tea, or whatever you may want."

In an excited manner she said, "No, no, don't disturb anyone, please. I should hate it, but I 'm so harassed, I feel inclined to faint, I 'm quite overcome," and she rested her head on my shoulder, and how pretty she looked!

"Poor girl! Poor girl!" I sympathetically exclaimed. "I 'm so sorry."

After a sigh or two she said, "Perhaps a little brandy *might* alleviate this feeling of faintness, and perhaps I had better accept your hospitality, though what my people would think I dare not imagine."

While putting her cloak round her pretty uncovered shoulders, and while for the second time replacing the piece of chiffon round her head, her

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soft cheek came in contact with mine. After a long pause she said :

" I think you 're a dear good fellow, but I wonder what my people would think? I *know* what my brother would *say*. He has a horrible temper."

She then commented on the numerous servants they kept "at home." Slaveys she called them. "We keep eight or nine not counting the butler." This last curious assertion stuck in my throat a bit, and I looked at her suspiciously. Her pretty and rather assumed aristocratic voice entirely altered as she said, "We've got a pretty big *minage*, you know!"

I rather coldly responded, "How *should* I know?"

She replied curtly, "Do you mean that for sarcasm, or do you wish to insult me?"

"Certainly not," I replied.

Suddenly I became *very* suspicious of her. Her manner was so strange and so changed that I realised that I was in the hands (or the arms) of an impostor, and much regretted that I had mentioned where I lived. Fortunately I had not told her the number of my house.

In her strangely altered manner she asked me how much further was my "roost," because she was n't going to "stamp it any longer for anyone," and if I did n't get her a cab soon, she would sit on a doorstep till one came, even if she screamed down the houses.

We had just passed my house, which was at the corner of New Cavendish Street, and had crossed the road, and this unseemly altercation took place

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outside the residence of the late Sir Richard Quain, the eminent physician.

I need not describe how uncomfortable I felt, having lived in Harley Street for only a year, and hoping to make a great impression as a fashionable portrait painter and as an exemplary citizen, and having many friends and acquaintances in the neighbourhood.

And here I was, in the *very* early morning, concerned in a disreputable disturbance. I said, "I think I'll wish you good-night."

The manners of the fair beauty had absolutely changed by this time. She was very excited, flinging her arms about and gesticulating, while at the top of her voice in the wildest manner, she shouted, "Good-night be d——d. You have got to see me home to my parents' house at Highgate. You've behaved like a scoundrel, luring me away from my friends and trying to decoy me into your rooms, I've read of such blackguards. You have got to see me home to my people or I'll scratch your d——d eyes out"; and placing her nails on my forehead, she seemed ready to suit the action to the word.

Never in my life had I encountered such a terrible creature. I pacified her for a moment by assuring her it was my earnest desire "to see her safely home to her people," and at that instant an empty hansom cab came along and drew up at the side of us. I exclaimed, "Here's a cab at last."

I handed the cabman a handful of silver, about fifteen shillings, and asked him how much the fare

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was, giving the impression that money was of no object to me. He replied, "Only nine and six, which is a poor fare to Highgate."

"Quite agree with you, cabby," I said. "Rotten. Have you got change for a fiver?" hoping he had n't. "Never mind. I've got plenty of stuff in the old show here. Get in, dear," I said, and handed the fair Cyprian in—she had for the moment quieted down. "Cabby!" I said, "turn the old gee round, and stop at my caboose, and I'll give you a drink while I'm getting 'the ready,' and I pointed to the house *next door but one* to mine, Dr. Birch's!

He turned the horse round, and I walked at the side of the cab, but let it overtake me while I was lighting a cigarette, as the cab was passing the windows of my house in Harley Street. On tiptoe I rushed down New Cavendish Street, where the front door was situated, and with my latchkey quickly entered unobserved, and put up the chain. In a second I went up the stairs in the dark to my bedroom. All was quiet, but not for long!

Soon, to my horror, I heard that dreadful woman shouting at the top of her voice, "Where is he? Did he go down the area or go in with his key? Which house was it? This was the one!" Peering through the Venetian blinds of the darkened room I beheld her at my door, hammering with the knocker with all her might. The noise roused my manservant, Smith, but I stopped him on the staircase, as he was proceeding downstairs to open the door. Smith was, and is, a most respectable man, and what he thought of me I dare n't think. With

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my hand I waved him back and assured him in a whisper it was "all right."

He said, "It may be Mr. Warner, sir" (who was staying with me), "and perhaps he has lost his key."

"No," I answered. "It is *not* Mr. Warner. The *lady* is dresssed in white satin, and for goodness' sake don't look out of the window, don't raise the blinds or turn up the light. Go to bed and keep quiet, and I'll explain everything in the morning. But whatever happens, don't go near the door and keep away from the windows. Go to bed, Smith," to which he replied:

"All right, sir—very good, sir—good-night, sir."

The knocking continued for some time, and then the "lady" crossed the road to Mr. MacLaren's, still shouting and cursing at the top of her voice, and swearing she had been betrayed and ruined. She then crossed again to the opposite corner, and while she was hammering at Sir Richard Quain's a constable arrived on the scene and seized the fair one by the arms, and having apparently recognized her, exclaimed:

"Hullo! You're at it *again*, are you? Come along with me, *Miss Tottie Fay*, and you'd best go quietly. Why don't you keep down in Piccadilly? What do you want to bother the Doctors for?" She was making her usual explanation, but his only answer was, "I know all about that; come along, Maud"; and off they went, but not without a struggle in which his helmet was knocked off.

It turned out to be none other than the famous "Tottie Fay, alias Maud Rothschild," the most

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notorious impostor in London in those days, whose blackmailing tactics in the West End made a most remarkable record.

About that period scarcely a week passed in which her name was not in the papers, generally headed, "Tottie Fay again." "'Maud' shuts her dress in a door." "A Rothschild in trouble." I believe some kind lady took upon herself the responsibility of trying to reform "Tottie Fay," and after spending a great deal of her time and money was obliged to abandon it as a hopeless case.

A very well-known smart man about town had a most unpleasant encounter with the fair "Tottie" near Jermyn Street which ended in her deliberately shutting her dress in his front door and screaming for the Police. It would not be fair to mention his name, I can only say, he is a very tall, middle-aged man, with a big beard now turning grey, belongs to many clubs and is a famous dancer.

On one occasion a friend of mine, by name Andrew Macfarlane, a sailor and a jolly good fellow, spent a few days' leave in London, and stayed at my house. We dined out and finished the evening at some rather rowdy resort, and returned home in the early hours of the morning. Later in the day, when the maid took Macfarlane a cup of tea, she rushed out of the room nearly choked, for it was full of gas, which quickly spread through the house. He had *blown out* the gas before going to bed, leaving the tap turned on to its fullest extent. When told of this grave error of judgment, all he said was, "Well, all I can tell you is that I have never slept better in my life!"

## CHAPTER XII

### CECIL CLAY MAKES ME AN OFFER TO GO ON THE STAGE

I WAS at Lord's at the Eton and Harrow match, in 1885, drinking a very good glass of champagne on the top of the late Johnnie Dickenson's coach, when Cecil Clay—who was the husband of the late Rosina Vokes, the brilliantly clever and versatile actress—climbed on the coach and joined me in a glass of this excellent beverage. "My dear Weedon," he said, "there are rumours about that you are seriously thinking of going on the stage; is it true?"

I confessed to him the rumour had some foundation, and Charles Wyndham had already offered me a little part, and I explained my situation. "Dear old Weedon," he said, "I am delighted to hear it." "Why?" I said. "Because," he replied, "I hope you will come with us to America." "What, to act?" I said. "Yes," he answered, "to play some good parts in some good comedies, and I'll give you £15 a week!" "When are you starting?" I asked. "In two or three weeks," he replied. "Let me know to-morrow, dear Weedon." "Right you are," I said, "I will," and I did, I accepted with joy, delighted to get away from my bad luck in London.

This was July; by the end of August I was re-

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

hearsing for a drama and a farce, and on September 7, 1885, I made my first appearance on the stage at the Old Prince of Wales Theatre, Liverpool, in a play called "Time will tell," by Herbert Gardner, now Lord Burghclere. I played the part of an unscrupulous lawyer in the prologue. It was a wretched performance, but fortunately I was on the stage only a few minutes. How thankful the audience must have been for that.

No one seemed to care, the audience were quite resigned, whilst I was dreadfully nervous and could n't get the pitch of the house or manage my voice, and the sensational music which accompanied the dialogue did n't assist me.

But I bucked up considerably in the last piece, "The Tinted Venus," by Anstey, adapted by William Wilde, in which I played the heroic Barber, and dear Rosina Vokes "The Statue."

Rosina Vokes was my first instructress in the Art of Acting. She was the manageress and general producer, and while coaching and teaching one all she knew, she made a great point of never interfering with one's individuality, which, in my opinion, is of the greatest importance to the player and the play. One of the mistakes the producer frequently makes is in insisting that every intonation and action shall be the same as his own, with the result that the actor is simply giving a slavish imitation of the producer, and speaking and acting in a manner that is quite unnatural to himself, and therefore unreal to the audience.

Miss Vokes knew that there were many ways of expressing the various emotions, and wanted her



LORD ARTHUR POMEROY IN "THE PANTOMIME REHEARSAL"



## CECIL CLAY MAKES AN OFFER

company to depict them in their own natural manner and then added the value of her experience without destroying the individuality of the artist.

Willie Elliot (who was the stage manager) and I stayed at the same hotel at Liverpool, a Temperance Hotel, called "The Shaftesbury." We did n't stay there because we favoured the cause of temperance, not at all, but because it was cheap, and Brandon Thomas, who was also a member of the company, hearing how economically we were living, called on us the following day at lunch-time and said he was going to stay there also and secured a room. We wanted his jovial society, so we did n't think it necessary to tell him it was a *Temperance* hotel. He sat down to lunch with us and requested the waitress to bring a bottle of Bass; she replied, "Temperance," and turned away to attend to someone else.

Brandon looked at Willie Elliot and myself and said, "Tenpence, that's rather dear. I thought you said this hotel was *cheap*." We neither of us replied.

Thomas called the girl again, and said, "I don't mean a big bottle of bass, a small bottle."

The girl rather sharply replied, "I told you before it's *Temperance*."

Brandon remarked that he had never paid more than sixpence for a small bottle and frequently less.

A gentleman at an opposite table explained the situation; he said, "The maid didn't say 'tenpence,' but 'temperance.' This, sir, is a temperance hotel, and they don't sell Bass."

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

Thomas was amazed; he made no reply, but turned round to Elliot and myself and fixed us with a stony glare. "What are you chaps drinking?"

"Soda water," we replied.

Then he turned to the waitress and said, "Bring me some of that golden-coloured soda water that those gentlemen are drinking." We were obliged to pass our flask to him lest he should give us away.

Whether it was that Brandon Thomas and myself were worried with our debts, or the result of too much of the golden mixture that one foolishly imagines helps to smooth over all difficulties in this life, I don't know, but Thomas commenced to wish he were at home again, and the night before we left Liverpool for New York he asked me whether I had any messages to leave behind, for now was the time to do it; for, said he, pouring out from a large glass flask the golden mixture that he had procured from a licensed house into a tumbler half full of soda water, "Weedon, we shall never reach the other side. I dreamed last night we were clinging to rocks." He was then grasping the flask tightly with the right hand. "You and I, Weedon, with the waves splashing over us. Don't you want to write to somebody?"

"I don't know," I said, relieving him of the tight grip he had on the flask, "I don't think so."

"Have you made a will?" he asked me.

"No," I replied, "That's one advantage of having nothing in the world, you have n't got to bother about making a will."

When we were about half-way across the 'Atlan-

## CECIL CLAY MAKES AN OFFER

tic the ship behaved very badly, very badly indeed; we were two days in very rough seas. Brandon did n't seem to care what happened, but I could n't help thinking of his gloomy prophecy, he and I clinging to the rocks, so much so that I asked the purser if we were in danger of rocks. "Not here," he replied with a good-natured chuckle, "It's over four miles deep."

I was glad to know there were no rocks, but sorry to hear that the water was so deep, but was somewhat consoled when the purser told me that one could drown equally well in ten feet, but I could n't help thinking that drowning in water four miles deep seemed far worse. I also inquired of the purser if the shore boats were in perfect order. "I think so," he laughingly replied, "but if this big ship could n't live in this gale you may be perfectly sure those little boats could n't."

I staggered to Thomas's bunk and reported this favourable information which the purser had imparted to me about the shore boats. Brandon just shook me solemnly by the hand and said, "If anything happens to you, has your brother made himself responsible for your debts?"

"Good gracious, *no*," I replied.

"That's a good thing," said Thomas.

I turned into my bunk fairly depressed, and put cotton wool in my ears to deaden the horrible sound of the banging of the waves against the ship and the drenching rain, and the hideous grating noise of the screw when it comes out of the water, owing to the vessel pitching violently forward. I eventually slept, and when I awoke the next day, there was still

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

a pretty good swell on. But I saw one of the brightest blue skies I have ever seen. It was delightful, and remained like this till we arrived at New York — which resembled Paris more than London—with its white houses and green shutters. It was dreadfully hot, and at the Hoffman House I made my first acquaintance with a mosquito.

We opened at the Globe Theatre, Boston, in "The Parvenu," which had already been played there with their own popular favourite without success, so our start was not favourable.

But though they did n't care for the play, Miss Vokes made a great personal success, and the sharing manager, a man not overburdened with intelligence, suggested that Miss Vokes, while sitting on the branches of a tree in a pretty love scene, should sing the "Tit Willow" from the "Mikado," which was then all the rage. He was one of those ignorant men (there are many) who imagine that any play can be improved or bolstered up in the weak parts by the introduction of a song or dance.

My old friend W. R. Stavely, who, like myself, was then a novice, was n't sure of his words or his "make up." But as he was on the point of making his first entrance he assured me that he was n't "a bit nervous," and in his jovial manner said, "I always say that, whatever happens, they can't kill you." His axiom on this particular occasion very nearly failed, for the ex-pugilist sharing manager, who owned the theatre, rushed through the pass door on the conclusion of the play, asking where the man Stavely was. But Stavely, who was not on in the last act, by that time

## CECIL CLAY MAKES AN OFFER

was comfortably seated at his hotel, enjoying the delights of cold pork and "Boston beans."

As we did n't "strike oil" at Boston, we were sent on what is called "one night stands," for six weeks, frequently travelling all night after the performance. The changes of climate were very trying. I remember leaving Richmond in Virginia, where the heat was almost tropical, on the Saturday night, and arriving on Monday afternoon at Montreal, where it was snowing. Personally, I was never happier. Thanks to my benefactor, Cecil Clay, who had given me my first engagement at a capital salary, I commenced to see possibilities of my getting out of the mire, and I am ever grateful to him for his plucky and generous offer, the turning point in my career. It was a tremendous change for me, this totally different life.

I travelled with a paint box, a gun, and fishing rods, so there was always something to do if we were n't rehearsing. I was invariably painting in the daytime, a landscape, or sometimes members of our company would sit to me!!

As we journeyed on I was particularly struck with one picturesque little town with a waterfall close by, which I painted. "Is n't this a lovely village?" I said to Cecil Clay after the performance. "I don't agree with you, Weedon, it's a beastly ugly place," said Cecil. "What!" I exclaimed. "Have you seen the waterfall?" "No," he said, "but I've seen the *returns*, and you can take it from me, Weedon, that it may be a good place for a landscape painter but not for a theatrical manager." Whatever bad business we might have done made no dif-

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

ference to me, as I was receiving a salary, but since those days I have been a manager myself, and can now sympathise with the feelings of Cecil Clay.

There was a little one-act play, "The Milliner's Bill," in which Miss Vokes had made a great success with Brandon Thomas, so this was played with two other pieces, forming a triple bill, and "The Pantomime Rehearsal" was tried as a great experiment as the last piece. It was written by Cecil Clay and played first by amateurs including the Ponsonbys, "Claud and Scrobbie," in London. But making the characters distinguished amateurs, I fancy, emanated from Brandon Thomas and myself, and Brandon commenced to write his part, and I mine,—of course with Miss Vokes' permission.

We thought it might possibly appeal to the taste of the public, but we never imagined in our wildest dreams that it would achieve the enormous success it did. It caught on like a fever, and we returned to Boston and played to the capacity of the house for six weeks.

Outside the brilliant and mercurial performance of Miss Vokes, who had a most remarkable personality, there were Miss Carlingford and the beautiful Miss Edith Chester. Brandon Thomas, W. G. Elliot, and myself also established ourselves as favourites in the characters of typical English dudes, Brandon Thomas as the ideal heavy dragoon (Captain Tom Robinson), Willie Elliot playing Jack Deedes, the useful tame cat of the drawing room, the type of man who is asked everywhere (where that type is wanted), who pays for his salt, who gets a good lunch, or dinner, *on terms*, the terms

## CECIL CLAY MAKES AN OFFER

being that he must always be ready to entertain the guests, get up charity concerts or amateur theatricals at a moment's notice, whilst I played Lord Arthur, a rather good-natured, fatuous, conceited ass, who had a colossal opinion of his own powers and ability in acting.

Failure was known to us no more, and we simply "wallowed" in success wherever we went.

It was a strange experience for me. That a few months before in England I was a painter who could walk through the streets as a humble individual without notice seemed like a dream. In that short space of time I had become a marked man; whether at Sherry's, Delmonico's, or walking down Fifth Avenue, I was spotted everywhere as "Vokes' Dude." I was asked everywhere and put up as an honorary member for nine clubs. I never really realised till a year afterwards what a success I had made. I had produced a new kind of stage dude or masher. Up till then the public had been acquainted with the wonderful character that Sothern had created, "Lord Dundreary," with long side whiskers and the lisp and a stutter. But the other variations of the masher had generally been depicted by a very tall man, with a very fair wig and a very pale face, who constantly drawled out, "Haw! Haw! Don't-cher-know? Haw! Weally!" So my masher came like a thunderbolt, with dark hair, a little bit curly in front, and red face, a small man dressed in the pink of fashion. I was the first actor to introduce the crease down the centre of the trousers, a huge straw-coloured diamond in the centre of my shirt and a small emerald above and

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

below it, which I copied from Lord Kinnoull and the Hon. H. Tyrwhitt-Wilson, two of the very smartest men of that day. Some say I took the cheery chuckle and the smile from Lord Craven — in fact, he told me so himself — but this was not the case. I modelled my character on a type of the smart young peer one used to meet about at sporting gatherings and clubs.

The hand shake I modelled on the Prince of Wales's (afterwards King Edward VII). It must not be confounded with the ridiculous shake of the hand that one unfortunately witnessed and suffered from too often in those days at afternoon tea parties and receptions, when your hand was lifted *high in the air*. It was a vigorous shake of the hand with an extended arm, held rigid, and keeping the recipient of the shake well at *arm's length*. It took New York by storm.

I must have been a realistic character, for when we were playing at Providence, R. I., on the final night, I strolled down from my dressing room, dressed as "Lord Arthur," on to the stage at a quarter to ten. I was only playing in "The Pantomime Rehearsal" and was not wanted till then, and I was talking to Miss Chester at the back of the scene. The local manager was fussing about and making himself generally objectionable, and I heard him shouting to someone, "We're here on *business*, and no one's allowed behind here, and you had best get back to your FAUTEUILS," pronounced by him "Fowtiles!" I still continued chattering, not dreaming for a moment that these remarks were intended for me. Presently he came up to me, and

## CECIL CLAY MAKES AN OFFER

in a very rude way said: "You 've no right here, you must *clear*." Being a novice, I concluded he meant I was interfering with the setting of the scene and expressed my sorrow and stepped back half a dozen yards. I had on my opera hat and was putting on a pair of white gloves. Presently he addressed me again "with more violence in his tone," "See here! I 've spoken to you *before*. We 've no use here for tramps or dudes!" I answered, "Look here, d—n it, who the—," but before I could say another word, he seized me round the waist and would have thrown me out of the building, but fortunately at that moment Brandon Thomas came to the rescue and explained who I was. The local manager was most profuse in his apologies, and said he had never seen anything like it before!! (or heard anything, either), as my make up, and performance were "*it*."

W. R. Stavely played the part of Sir Charles Grandison, and was, and is, a great artist in "*make up*" and, much to the confusion of Miss Vokes, was continually altering his appearance, and so completely changing his character. Sometimes he would be clean shaven, then a heavy moustache. One night he put on a beard, I have never seen such a realistic beard before or since; he was in the theatre two hours before I arrived, and said that he ought to have come earlier, as to put on a beard of that kind required the best part of three hours. Hairs seemed to grow naturally out of his face, and it was no small wonder when Miss Vokes made her entrance and saw this strange man on the stage, that she was much annoyed. She

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

snatched the opportunity of saying to me. "Who's brought this man on the stage? Is Mr. Thomas or Elliot responsible for this tomfoolery? How dare they?" I quickly replied that it was Stavely in a new make up. The good-natured smile came over her face again as, recovering from her fright, she said, "That man will be the death of me," and he was requested for the future to keep to "one make up for each part and not to vary it."

In the following year I went out again to the States for another season, playing in "The Pantomime Rehearsal" and Vere Quicket in "The Schoolmistress," Sam Gerridge in "Caste," and the old lord in "The Quiet Rubber," and other plays, and I could have made a fortune if I had remained in America for a few years, but I pined for home and wanted to act in London.

So to London I returned. I suppose I was foolish and conceited enough to imagine that London was entirely engrossed in discussing my success in America. I soon discovered my mistake. London knew nothing about it, and when I entered the Clubs with a sort of "Here we are again" kind of jollity, members nodded their heads to me over their newspapers, and perhaps one would say, "Weodon, why don't you come to the Club oftener? It must be nearly a month since you 've been here. What are you painting now?"

I had to explain, and to walk about blowing my own trumpet (which I have always detested doing), and I was always most grateful to meet any American who could explain to them that I was "on the stage and had made a great success in America."

## CHAPTER XIII

### MY FIRST APPEARANCE IN LONDON

I NOW applied for an engagement to every London manager, including Charles Hawtrey, who *half* promised me a part, but it did n't come off. I was very anxious to get to work, for I still owed a lot of money, although I had been paying off my debts by degrees all the time I was in America. At last George Edwardes had the pluck to make me an offer to play Woodcock in the old two-act farce "Woodcock's Little Game" at the Gaiety in front of the short burlesque "Esmeralda."

Nothing would have induced me to appear in such very antiquated stuff, as "Woodcock's Little Game," but the fact of being so hard up. I had no alternative, I could not refuse the part, but the play was so old-fashioned and silly that I suggested it should be played in the costume of that period, about 1860, with the tight trousers strapped down and tight coat sleeves, and a high collar and stock, the dialogue was so out of place and stilted and was so incongruous with modern dress.

It was a period when gentlemen apparently thought it necessary to put on a velvet coat and a smoking cap when they wanted to smoke a cigar. I suppose the explanation is that in those days smok-

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

ing was regarded more or less as a disgusting habit, and the smoking cap was to prevent the hair from smelling of smoke, and as the hair was worn rather long,—according to the pictures of the time—it might possibly retain the aroma to the prejudice of the fair sex, who usually had a horror of smoking in those days. How times have changed!

As I have said, smoking was regarded more or less as a vice, but drinking immoderately was permissible, even to the extent of a gentleman getting intoxicated in the presence of ladies, who frequently professed to be amused rather than annoyed, but I need hardly say such an indiscretion nowadays would n't be tolerated for a moment, and the offender would be banished from every decent house.

In this play "Woodcock's Little Game" I was supposed to be a *modern* gentleman, and yet I kept on referring to "my smoking cap and carpet slippers," to "tea and buns in the afternoon at the Pantheon," which for many years, even then, had been taken over by the Gilbeys for a wine depot, but in the forties was a fashionable Bazaar rebuilt by Smirke, R. A. The old building was burned down in about 1791, and the conflagration was painted by the great Turner. The reference to the Pantheon is, I believe, now cut out of the play.

It was in 1887 I played "Woodcock," and these references were as much out of date then as if an up to date masher in a modern play suggested supping at Evans' or dancing at Cremorne. I only mention these facts as a slight excuse for the failure

## MY FIRST APPEARANCE IN LONDON

I made in the part of "Woodcock" on my first appearance on the London stage. The part was not "actor proof."

George Edwardes never gave greater evidence of his keen sense of humour than in putting on such an old-fashioned farce. How he must have smiled to himself at the thought of the public swallowing such stuff!

On Woodcock's first entrance, after the servant leaves him, he has a speech—or rather a monologue—containing one hundred and ninety three words. I wonder the audience didn't tear up the benches, they were certainly hissing before I had got half through it. "Woodcock" is *supposed* to be a gentleman who has led rather a fast life in London, and has just married and wants to settle down in the country. So he proceeds to tell his old and faithful servant that he has bought "two morning gowns in Merino, with cords and tassels, three Woollen smoking caps, three Cloth ditto, three Silk ditto, three Velvet ditto, and twelve pairs of slippers," and he makes over to his servant his entire stock of dress coats, waistcoats, white neckcloths, and patent leather boots!

Why, indeed? Is this gentleman, because he has entered into the happy state, never going to dress for dinner, or because perhaps he lives in the country, is he always going to appear in "morning gowns and smoking caps?" Is this well-to-do gentleman, after grubbing about in the garden, going to sit down to dinner with his pretty young wife in his dirty clothes? Surely not.

"Mrs. Carver," the mother-in-law in the play,

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

speaks of a "glass of sherry and a sponge cake," delightfully Victorian! There are also many allusions to "Assemblies" and "Routs," whatever they may be, and later on in the play, when Woodcock renounces his intention of residing in the country, and of living again in London to please his wife, he declares that he will revel in "redowas" and "plunge into polkas." He says, "I'll have a shy at the *sausages*, I mean the Schottische."

This 1860 language was spoken by people in *modern* dress, and later in the play two of the characters leave the ballroom to have a duel with pistols on Primrose Hill, which for over thirty years has been surrounded by houses and been lighted with hundreds of gas lights, put there owing to the constant attention drawn to it by the late John Hollingshead, who was always writing to the papers on the dangers of a public thoroughfare being unlighted.

One of the worst faults of the play was the "tag" which it was my misfortune to speak. I advanced to the footlights in the conventional manner and said, "I am now going back to 'Stow in the Wold,'" which gave the opportunity to the comic man in the gallery to reply, "And a jolly good job too." (Roars of laughter.) I proceeded, "That is, if our kind friends in front will assure me that success has crowned 'Woodcock's Little Game.'" The Gods shouted, "No, no." "Go home, Weedon." "Stick to your paints, don't act." My kind friends in the stalls did their best, but they were in the minority, and when I foolishly responded to a call I got it pretty hot from the pit and gallery.

## MY FIRST APPEARANCE IN LONDON

No wonder that there is a superstition that to speak the "tag" at rehearsals is unlucky. I venture to predict that any play with a "tag," especially like the one referred to, is enough to bring disaster on any management.

I laboured under the great disadvantage of making my first appearance in London in a silly old-fashioned play, and also of playing a light-comedy part, rather out of my line, and following the famous Charles Matthews in the rôle, for the play had n't been acted for many years, and I have not seen it announced in the programme of any theatre since. Perhaps my performance settled it, until this revival I don't think it had been played since Matthews' time *in* London, though Charles Collette, that excellent light comedian, had played it many times "outside" London.

I was also asked by the producer to do the same business that Charles Matthews did, and when making my exit at the end of the first act, the stage manager said, "Now, Mr. Grossmith, throw the tails of your frock coat over the back of your head."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because Matthews did it," he replied.

"Never," said I. "Not having had the good fortune to see the great Charles Matthews, I naturally can't imitate his methods, and I must do things my own way."

"Really," said the producer, and looking at the other members of the company for applause and encouragement, in his best cynical vein added, "We have many of us heard through Press notices what

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

a brilliant actor Mr. Weedon Grossmith is in America, but is he going to improve on Charles Matthews in London?"

"That's not quite the point," I replied. "How Charles Matthews did this business I don't know; at any rate, he was a gentleman in every part he played, and I am much afraid his imitators have vulgarised his business, for it does n't seem to me possible that Charles Matthews would make an exit from a drawing room in the presence of ladies throwing his coat tails entirely over his head, and whether he did or not *I* absolutely decline to do it! ! "

There is nothing so bad in Art or fatal to the actor as to imitate another man's methods. Irving had his own method and mannerisms, which when imitated conveyed nothing. Arthur Roberts will throw off a lot of bogus sporting jargon, place two fingers to his lips, and then wave his hand, all of which business causes a roar of laughter. Another man imitates this action, and it means nothing. Charles Hawtrey has a way on the stage, when trying to get out of some dilemma or palpable lie, of putting on a most admirable smile, he rocks a bit to and fro and blinks his eyes, and the audience chuckle with delight. Another actor blinks his eyes after telling a lie, and the audience think that he is near-sighted and ought to wear glasses or consult an oculist. There is no intelligence in the imitation.

Cyril Maude made his first appearance in a West End Theatre on this same memorable occasion in "Woodcock's Little Game," and made a hit in the

## MY FIRST APPEARANCE IN LONDON

part of "Larkings," a dude. The late George Stone was also excellent in it as "Swansdown."

A failure on a first appearance in London is a very serious thing for the actor, and he has a bad time everywhere.

At any gathering I went to after this, people said nothing, but if sympathetic quietly took my hand as if I had lost a dear relative, and if indifferent looked the other way when I entered a room. The managers treated me as a leper and avoided me. How I wished I had never come back from America! Charles Hawtrey, who had just finished the run of that enormous success "The Private Secretary," and was very prosperous, and in management at the Globe sent for me, and suggested my playing in the next piece, but he thought better of it, for I heard no more from him. Tired of waiting for offers and characteristic of my ever vacillating disposition, I threw up the sponge, and went back to my first love, painting, and took a furnished studio in Cunningham Place, St. John's Wood. Here I painted two or three pot-boilers and luckily sold them, and got a commission from the late Joseph Guedalla, the solicitor, to paint his two young daughters, very pretty little girls, and I forgot my recent failure on The Stage.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### HENRY IRVING

DURING these sittings I received one day a telegram from Henry Irving, asking me to come to the Lyceum Theatre at once. I obeyed, I need hardly say.

"Do you think you could play Jacques Strop," he said, "to my Robert Macaire?"

It took away my breath. When I had recovered it, I said, "Could I? I am positive I could. I could play it better than anyone in London." (Take my tip, young actors, this is the way to impress the management.)

Irving smiled (what a beautiful smile he had!) and replied, "Well, my boy, I hope you're speaking the truth. I have heard good things about you in America from Booth and Jefferson." (That's a pretty good recommendation, I thought.) "Will you rehearse on approval?"

"Rather," I replied.

"All right, come down here to-morrow at ten o'clock sharp."

I stepped out on to the pavement feeling as if I were floating on air. I gave a crossing sweeper sixpence, and with a broad smile on my face I courteously apologised to a market gardener who had shouldered me off the pavement into the road.



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## HENRY IRVING

Next morning I had a private run through the part with Henry Irving alone. At its conclusion he shook hands with me as he said, "ten to-morrow!" That was all, but enough for *me*.

I shall never forget those rehearsals; everyone was called, even the "extra people," to the *first* one, and frequently the band also. I kept my eyes and ears pretty wide open. Art came first with Irving, it came before everything. What a contrast to the theatre opposite, where I had last played! The Lyceum was permeated with Art, absolutely regardless of the business aspect, and the association and surroundings made me feel very proud that I was an actor and in such company. After the two most trying rehearsals I have ever experienced in my life, Irving said he thought I should do, and it would give me "a good start in London." I told him that while he was in America I had made my first London appearance at the Gaiety, and was a "failure."

He replied, "That does n't affect my opinion in the slightest. The part probably did n't suit you. How much salary do you want?"

"Well," I hesitatingly replied, "it's different to America, where I've made a success; they don't know me here. Would ten pounds be too much? That's what I had over the road, at The Gaiety."

"Not at all," said Irving, "but is it enough?"

"Quite," I replied. I didn't tell him that I would have played the part for nothing, and have willingly given a premium to have done so (if I had had the premium). I positively received £10 a week, to be *instructed* in the art of acting by the

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greatest actor of our time! It was worth hundreds to me, both from an artistic and a business point of view. The pains and trouble Irving took with everyone over the slightest detail were remarkable. I admit he was very trying at times, especially when I was doing something quietly humorous—or rather, nothing—and he would gaze on me very solemnly and say, “*That’s* not funny, my boy. You must do something *funny* there.”

I proved to him however on the first night that sitting perfectly still on the staircase looking the picture of misery WAS decidedly funny; at least the audience thought so, so much so that the great chief said to me afterwards, “What were you doing on the staircase that made the audience laugh so much?”

“Nothing,” I replied.

“All right, my boy, do it again,” he answered.

He was always struggling to get a certain effect, and he would never rest till he succeeded. He had a way of putting one hand on your shoulder and saying, “My boy, use your brains! What’s the matter with you? Are you in love?” as a matter of fact I was at the time, a little, and I think I generally have been more or less in that condition both before and since.

Irving would say, “Now, my boy, just try and concentrate your attention, if you can for awhile, and follow my instructions. Whenever I bluster as Macaire *you* must always echo me! See! Imitate me! Do you understand? No, I see you don’t! You’re not listening, my boy!”

“Yes, I am, Mr. Irving,” I feebly replied.

“Then use your brains,” he said. “Now you

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understand you 've got to *imitate me*. That 's simple enough, is n't it? I 'm the swaggering thief, you are the timid contemptible thief, but when I swagger *you* must swagger too, you must imitate *me*." He meant of course that I was to copy the swagger. I wish I had understood his meaning. "Now then, are you ready?" he shouted loudly. "Good! We don't want to stop the rehearsal again." I plead guilty to giving a mild imitation of the great actor, and was preparing my feeble mimicry, when Irving, as Macaire, got into position, banged the table with his stick, and shouted in the words of the play, "Hi, Landlord, Landlord, why the devil don't you bring some refreshment for myself and my noble friend the Marquis?" "Go on," he said to me aside, "go on!"

I rushed at it, hit the table, and gave them my regular, conventional back-drawing-room imitation of the great man himself. Jogging my head and waving my hands in the air, I shouted, "Hi, hi — er — er — Landlord — er — er — why the devil — er — er — er — don't you bring — er — er — some — er — er — refreshment — er — for — my — er — self and — er — er — er." I never got any further. Fifty people on the stage collapsed — some with fear, others with laughter. Never had such a thing been known within the sacred walls of the Lyceum. The late Harry Loveday, the stage manager, turned pale with fright; the great chief glared at me for a moment with his eyes dilated, and then gave me a push saying, "Stupid fellow!" He practically pushed me off the stage. I hesitated a moment, like Lord 'Arthur in the "Pantomime

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Rehearsal," and then threw down my part and with dignity walked as far as the stage door with the intention of leaving the Lyceum for ever, *but*, without stopping, revolved quickly and picked up the part again and resumed my place on the stage. I thought to myself, "Resigning the part won't punish him." For I knew there were many men in the company who were dying to play the part, and who had already rehearsed it. "I'll have my revenge on the chief by playing it, and playing it d——d well, or I'm much mistaken."

I assumed my best smile, and said, "It's awfully stupid of me, sir, but I think if Mr. Loveday will take me alone in the part for half an hour he can make it all clear to me and save a lot of your valuable time."

"Yes, yes," said Loveday, much relieved, "certainly," and we went on to the next scenes.

We all had a pretty bad time during those rehearsals, and Martin Harvey, who had been with Irving for some years, admitted that the rehearsals of Macaire were the most trying that he had ever been through, and I think it was probably the anxiety of engaging a man like myself with only two years' experience on the stage for such an important part that was responsible for the chief's ultra irritability.

At last the first night came. "The Amber Heart" by Alfred Calmour played by Miss Ellen Terry and George Alexander, preceded "Robert Macaire," which began at nine, and, when the call boy came to the dressing room, which I was sharing with Wenman and Frank Tyars, and announced "Overture and beginners," I felt sick and ill and

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would have given fifty pounds to the other men who wanted to play the part to have done so. "Good luck," my comrades said. "Feeling all right?" asked Tyars, genially. "Oh, I think so," I answered, "first rate." "You look rather pale," said Wenman. "Oh, that's the make-up," I said, "I've got to look pale, you know," and I slowly descended the stairs to the stage.

The sensational music of the overture was booming away, and when the curtain rose to the dancing and the shouts of the merry villagers, oh, how I envied them their good spirits and light hearts!

I stood at the wing waiting for the cue to enter. Presently down came the chief from his dressing room, looking picturesque, but *terrible*, as the villainous Macaire.

Meredith Ball, the musical conductor, had started the grotesquely sensational music for Robert Macaire's entrance. Irving threw back the lappets of his ragged blue coat, gave a twist to his snuff-box to see that the creaking lid was working all right,—a most important point, for when the timid Marquis, Jacques Strop, was several times on the point of compromising the pair of them, Macaire gave the snuff-box a twist or a grind, on hearing which Jacques Strop recovered himself.

But before Irving made his entrance, getting up all his Macaire swagger and throwing his stick under his left arm, he turned to me with a most encouraging pat on the shoulder, and with a sweet smile, said, "You're all right, my boy, don't be nervous"; but I noticed that his own right hand, which held a cigarette, was *trembling*.

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I watched him from the wings as he swaggered on to the bridge. Oh, what a reception he had! I thought it would never finish; then the music changed to a quick tremuloso—my cue—and Macaire waved his stick, and on I came with a rapid run!

What an evening it was, an evening of excitement both in front and behind the footlights!

It was wonderful how Irving held the audience, how they followed every word and gesture. When he was planning the murder of the rich old man staying at the Inn, he sat on a table cutting a stick with a long clasp knife and leaning over Jacques Strop, instructing him what to do, and in a *whisper*—which could be heard at the back of the gallery—he said, “When all is quiet we will go into the old man’s room, No. 13 and collar the swag.”

“But,” I said, wiping the perspiration from my forehead, “suppose he should wake?”

Irving glanced at me, then to the left, and made a pause of nearly half a minute before he answered; then with a horrible grin he slipped lightly off the table, and with a turn of the hand the blade of the knife shut with a snap, and placing it in his pocket, he said, “He *won’t wake*.” The effect he produced by this simple action was extraordinary, and made one’s flesh positively creep.

Luckily the audience took to me at once. On my first exit with Irving (for we always went on and off almost together) my dresser was at the wing with my hand looking-glass, so that I could see that my make up was presentable, for I received a lot of rough handling from Macaire. While I

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was holding the glass in front of me, Irving slapped me on the back, shouting, "Bravo, my boy," and knocked the glass out of my hand and broke it. This mascot brought me good luck for very many years afterwards and also, I hope, to Irving himself. I have that glass still; it was broken again on the first night of "The New Boy," which play ran for fourteen months.

Irving's realism as Macaire was something remarkable, and horrible in its brutality, and before the end of the play three ladies had fainted, and some years afterwards, while dining with my friends Dr. and Mrs. Theo. Hoskin, my hostess told me *she* had fainted on the first night of "Macaire." Towards the end of the play the cowardly robber, Jacques Strop (I am almost invariably cast for cowards, cads, and snobs), is carried off by the gendarme screaming with fright at the vision of the Guillotine before him, whilst the bold braggart, Macaire, makes a stand for his life. When the gendarmes laid hands on him, he waved them off, contemptuously saying, "One moment, gentlemen, if you please; I will go with you peacefully, you need not drag the clothes from my body. Remember I am a *gentleman!*" and on Sergeant Loupy ordering his men to release their hold, Macaire thanked them and took his snuff-box from his pocket, and in the style of a first-class dandy took a pinch, saying in the most polite manner, "Gentlemen, Robert Macaire is, and always has been, a brave and bold man" (suddenly his manner changes into the manner of a most desperate Hooligan), "*And so he will die,*" and threw the

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contents of the snuff-box into the eyes of the men who had arrested him, who, being blinded for the moment, gave Macaire the opportunity of escaping, which he accomplished by jumping through a large window at the back of the room, shattering the glass in every direction. This window, the late Harry Loveday told me, took two hours putting together every day. The order was given to fire, and the soldiers fired their carbines through the broken window and soon afterwards Macaire appeared at the door like a wounded wild beast. I have never seen anything more awful than his appearance. At the wing some bullock's blood was squeezed over his head, and when he made his appearance at the door with a horrible scream and a groan, the blood poured down his hair on to his face and clothes, as he staggered down and fell dead on the stage!

This "bloody business" was cut out on the following night, but when I toured the provinces with him he put it back again at Manchester, and it was a great success there!

His performance of "Macaire" was a masterpiece! His picturesque appearance as the black-guardly, ragged ruffian, his terrific swagger, his brilliant comedy, and his intensely grim tragedy will always live in my memory as the most artistic and realistic acting it has ever been my good fortune to witness.

In the provinces "Robert Macaire" was played only twice a week, on Fridays and Saturdays, and preceded by "The Bells." There was never a performance for which hundreds of people were not

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turned away. It was indeed a splendid programme, though tremendously hard work for the chief. But that did n't bother him, he was a demon for work. On other nights "Faust" was played, and "The Lyons Mail" and "Louis XI." George Alexander was the leading juvenile man then, and Martin Harvey also played important parts.

Never have I played with any actor so conscientious as Henry Irving. Directly he stepped on the stage as Macaire, till the curtain fell on the last act, he was the swaggering brute. He seemed to get right inside the character, and never for an instant dropped it. He used to say to me, "You are not to know there is an audience, you must look upon them as cabbages, and remember, my friend, the boy who has paid his sixpence at the back of the gallery is entitled to hear as well as anyone in the stalls. Get your voice *out*, my lad, pitch it *out*." It is no easy matter to get your voice to travel to the back of the pit or gallery, and the same time not appear to be shouting.

Sir Charles Wyndham gave me some very sound instruction on this point many years ago. It is one of the most difficult achievements on the stage to appear to be talking naturally as one would in a drawing room and yet be heard distinctly at the back of the house.

It's very easy to talk quietly and naturally for the benefit of the first two rows of the stalls and the stage boxes, but to get the same effect to the back of the pit of a large theatre is another matter altogether.

I was lunching one day at a Club where I was

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an honorary member, and the next table was occupied by some young men, and from their conversation I soon gathered they had been playing in amateur theatricals in a country house. They did n't know me, fortunately, otherwise their conversation might have been restricted and less amusing.

Three of them were singing each other's praises to a fourth, who had evidently not been taking part in the performances.

"I wish you had been there," said one. "Herbert was wonderful! Immense!" "My dear chap, what price you?" Herbert retorted, "I've never seen anything better on the stage, and as for Birkendale, dear old sport, he could have wiped the floor with the best comedian going and swept up the pieces." Then they all talked at once, shouting each other's praises. Then the listener summed up the whole matter by saying, "My dear chaps, you need n't tell me, *I know*, and what I always say and shall always stick to, and why I prefer the amateur to the professional actor is because the amateur speaks naturally and does n't shout. The actor shouts, don't cha know! Am I right?"

These performances had taken place in a back drawing room, where there was no occasion to shout. The depth of the room would equal five rows of stalls at a theatre, after allowing six feet from the footlights, and seven feet space for the band. No dress circle, no pit or gallery to pitch your voice up to. It is indeed easy to act under these circumstances and appear to be "very natural."

There are amateurs *and* amateurs. I don't at all agree with an old theatrical saying that "a bad

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professional is better than a good amateur." There are professionals who have been on the stage for a dozen years or more who will never be sound actors. And there are amateurs in whom the acting gift is born, who could take their place at once on the professional stage and get a good salary and deserve it.

Leo Trevor, for instance, is a splendid low comedian with a strong personality suited to parts of the W. S. Penley order and could command a good salary; the late Augustus Spalding, a light comedian, not so very far behind Charles Matthews, and Colonel George Nugent as an eccentric comedian, is "top hole," and the two Ponsonbys, Claud and Eustace, and Colonel Newnham Davis are of the very first water. Mrs. Willie James, Miss Muriel Wilson, Lady Fitzwilliam, and Miss Faith Dawnay are quite professional in technique and could also command good salaries. Mrs. O'Hagan is also very experienced and attractive. There are also Burford Morrison, Major Jeffcock, Hugh Brodie, the Berry Brothers, and dozens of others who are equally talented.

While touring with Irving I met George Alexander and Bram Stoker in New Street, Birmingham, one day, outside a small hall where a showman was announcing at the top of his voice that they were "just about to commence." A magnificent African lion was pictured waltzing with the lion tamer. Alexander decided to see the performance, went in, and was charged sixpence. I followed, paying the same amount, but Bram Stoker was only asked *four-pence*—why I have never known. Bram Stoker was always well dressed, and looked *worth* the sixpence,

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but perhaps the showman thought he was poor as he was dressed in black. We all stood round the lion's cage in a back-yard, where a tent had been erected, and the trainer, dressed in pink fleshings and a spangled belt, informed us briefly that "the lion was the largest and the fiercest it had ever been his good fortune to master." A little boy said, "'As he ever ate anyone?" The lion tamer, though a little annoyed at being interrupted, condescended to inform the lad that the noble beast had been responsible for the deaths of several human beings, both black and white, and many were injured during his capture. He then drew the curtains aside, and we were all bound to admit that the lion was a magnificent creature. He seemed in a very bad temper, perhaps it was the look of the house, the audience consisting of only nine persons, all told.

The noble beast was snarling and giving us a good view of his great teeth, and when he pressed against the bars of the cage they seemed to give with his weight. In fact, it all looked very dangerous, and I was turning over in my mind whether I would n't have a cigarette outside, when the lion tamer seized a strong whip, opened the cage door, and leapt in. He struck the usual professional attitude, and then slashed the whip several times at the lion's legs, who in response sprang at him, throwing him to the ground. For a moment we thought it was part of the business, but *only* for a moment; in another second, with extraordinary acrobatic skill, the tamer had twisted from under the lion and was out of the cage, but unfortunately he omitted to close the door after him. I have often

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seen a crowd leave a theatre hurriedly after a bad performance. I have seen guests at a party rushing for the door to get to the supper rooms when a gentleman has announced that he will recite "The Pit's Mouth" or "The Pride of Battery B." But never have I seen a place emptied with such rapidity as that tent was. I did not wait to ask for my money back — there being no performance — nor did anyone else, I fancy. In three seconds I was in New Street, where I saw George Alexander and Bram Stoker jumping on to a passing bus, Stoker shouting to the conductor, "Don't stop for us, please, we can jump on." I went into the nearest shop, it was an estate agent's, and I closed the door after me because of the draught — for no other reason.

George Alexander — now Sir George — and a member of the County Council, may deny the veracity of this story, but it is absolutely true. Ask Lady Alexander, I am sure she will stand by me.

After a most delightful engagement with Henry Irving for four months in London and about the same time in the Provinces, this splendid experience came to an end. I so enjoyed the artistic atmosphere of his management that I should have liked to remain with him as long as possible, but his next production was "Macbeth," and the only chance for me was to play one of the "Witches," which, under the circumstances, would have been a waste of his money and my time, so I accepted an offer from Richard Mansfield, who had just arrived in England. I left Henry Irving with great regret on the Saturday at Birmingham.

## CHAPTER XV

ENGAGEMENTS. ERIC LEWIS. CANONBURY HOUSE.  
BRANDON THOMAS. THE NEW BUTLER.  
A. W. PINERO. AN ACCIDENT. POETRY

**I** OPENED with Mansfield on the Monday at Liverpool, playing the "Dude" in "Prince Karl."

We played this piece the following week at the Globe Theatre, London. After that I played Sir Benjamin Backbite in the "School for Scandal," with Kate Vaughan as Lady Teazle, and a charming performance it was. She was the perfection of grace. Every action and movement was a picture in itself. Sullivan, the American actor, played Joseph, H. L. Herbert played Charles, and Lal Brough, Moses.

We were doing this whilst Mansfield was preparing "Richard III." He asked me to play the Lord Mayor!

The part of the Lord Mayor is worth "one, one" a week, but Mansfield said he was willing to give me the same salary I had had with Henry Irving. This generosity was greatly appreciated by me. The Lord Mayor has only a line or two to say, but Mansfield said, "by introducing business he would make the part more important." The business he suggested was, that, as I crossed the stage in the "Crosby Hall" scene with my wand of office, he



*Photo Alfred Ellis*  
WEEDON GROSSMITH AS PERCY PALFREYMAN IN "WEALTH"



## ENGAGEMENTS

would have had several holes cut in the stage, so that when I placed the wand down on the floor it would disappear. Even that opportunity of being funny did n't tempt me, so for the second time I was bowled out of a theatre by Shakespeare. But I have found in my experience in this wonderful world that things frequently happen for the best, though we don't always think so at the time.

The next day Beerbohm Tree engaged me to play in Henry Arthur Jones' play, "Wealth."

The part was that of Percy Palfreyman, a dreadful young loafing, betting, city clerk. I was quite a success, and Tree would have liked me to remain in his company for the next production, as I would most gladly have done, but alas! Shakespeare again stood in my way, which *again* happened for the best, for a fortnight after I left Tree I opened at the Court Theatre, under the joint management of Mrs. John Wood — known to her intimates as "Ma Wood," — and Arthur Chudleigh, in Ralph Lumley's farce, "Aunt Jack," in which Mrs. John Wood was superb. I have never seen anyone to equal her in her particular line. Arthur Cecil, Eric Lewis, Allan Aynesworth (I think his first London engagement), and Florence Wood (afterwards Mrs. Ralph Lumley) were in the cast. It was a most delightful engagement, and the piece ran a year.

We felt we were in for a long run directly after the first night. So Eric Lewis and myself decided to take rooms at Datchet for the summer, coming to town every night by the seven o'clock train. Eric Lewis was desirous of coming to town by an earlier train, he was quite right too, but I told him the

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

train had never been late and there was no reason why it should be now. On the third night of the run we started by the seven o'clock train to town, and all went well until we got nearly to Clapham Junction, and then we halted for ten minutes, which grew into a quarter of an hour. We commenced to get alarmed. It went on another hundred yards, then stopped again. Then we heard that there had been an accident at Vauxhall. A few more yards, then half an hour's wait. At last, when we got within five hundred yards of Vauxhall station, Eric Lewis and I jumped out of the train and ran along the line to the platform. It was then nine o'clock. The exact time of the rise of the curtain! ! We jumped into a hansom and tore along the streets, much to my dislike, for I have always been afraid of hansoms, I have had so many accidents. We arrived at the Court Theatre at ten minutes past nine. There were *no understudies* ready at such an early stage of the run, so Chudleigh was, no doubt, thinking he would have to make a speech, and dismiss the huge audience from the theatre, which was crowded from floor to ceiling. When we arrived there, standing at the stage door were Chudleigh, his brother Lillies, and Teddy Jones, the musical conductor, who had played the overtures twice and was asking what he had "better do now?"

Lewis, as pale as death, shouted, "I am ready to go on as I am, so you can ring up," which they did, forgetting that I came on half a minute afterwards and had to put on a frock coat and a pair of side whiskers. I did this as I left the dressing room

## ERIC LEWIS

for the stage — it was a wonder they did not drop off with fright.

Eric Lewis has never forgotten what he considered to be a great injustice. Just before he went on the stage, all out of breath and faint with hurrying, he encountered Mrs. John Wood, who admonished him most severely. "Such a disgraceful and wanton act as to endeavour to kill a great success in its infancy, by abominable, indifferent neglect of duty, unworthy of a *novice*, and he ought to be ashamed of himself." He was so flustered, poor fellow, that when he went on the stage he could n't remember the words, and was what we call "fluffing" all over the place, and what seemed to him so unjust was that, the door of the scene being open, he could see Mrs. Wood. She embraced me, and he heard her say, "Never mind, my dear, don't worry, you 've plenty of time; it does n't matter how late you are, dear, so long as you 've arrived." No wonder he dried up.

Eric Lewis is one of the kindest and most gentle creatures alive, but he is horribly sensitive and often imagines what is said as a joke to be in earnest, and will walk out of the Garrick Club, where he is a great favourite, and not return for several months, merely for a chance word or even a look. A well-known actor says Lewis is "out for hurts."

Eric Lewis once said to me, "I 'm the most unpopular man in London." I replied, "I don't believe it. I have only heard one man ever say that." "Who was it?" eagerly asked Lewis. "Du Maurier? or Brookfield?" "Neither," I said. "It was *yourself*."

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

Lewis made an enormous hit a few years ago in Sutro's play, "Mollentrave on Women," and was enthusiastically called before the curtain several times on the first night. He told Sutro that it was the only time he had ever had a call to *himself*, and when he returned to his rooms after the performance, he had no one to tell his success to, so he took his father's photograph off the mantelpiece and told it to him.

My success in "Aunt Jack" seemed to hold out the promise of a lengthy engagement from Mrs. John Wood and Arthur Chudleigh, and I felt justified in making arrangements for the future, in somewhat launching out and increasing my expenditure. On my return from America my brother Gee-Gee had most kindly invited me to spend a few weeks at his house in Dorset Square until I was settled. That visit lasted eighteen months. I was very happy, I hope Gee-Gee was too. We did not see so very much of each other, as I was painting all day at my "Studio in the Wood" and dining at my Club before going to the theatre in the evening, but I always hurried back after the performance—or nearly always—to spend a cheery hour chatting to my brother and his delightful wife, known to all her huge circle of friends as "Rosa,"—one of the kindest and best of women, now alas, gone, and sadly missed.

Happy as I was in my comfortable quarters, my conscience at last came to my brother's rescue, and I felt that it was impossible for me to remain any longer as his non-paying guest. So I looked out for a house, with a room big enough to be used as a



MRS. JOHN WOOD  
*From an early oil painting*



## CANONBURY HOUSE

studio, and acting on the suggestion of the late Charles Townley, the well known popular author of many pantomimes, and writer of songs, I saw — liked, and took The Old House at Canonbury, which is Islington way.

It will not be out of place to say here that old houses, old furniture and old books are, and always have been, amongst my numerous hobbies. I may also mention old firearms of which I own a considerable number.

Canonbury House, of which “The Old House” was a part, was in the reign of Queen Elizabeth the country house of Sir Richard Spencer, then Lord Mayor of London; his town house was Crosby Hall.

The house had been “Adamized” about the year 1780, and Flaxman medallions, fine carved marble mantelpieces, and mahogany doors had been added, all good examples of their kind, but the little “withdrawing room of the XVI century” remained untouched.

It was a delightful old place with a charming old-fashioned, rather wild-looking garden, full of trees and shrubs, covering nearly an acre of ground. This garden I subsequently greatly improved by making a pond, in which numbers of carp, golden tench, roach and gudgeon disported themselves sheltered by the spreading leaves of quantities of water lilies; and a fountain rose proudly in the centre, fed by the New River Company (at some expense).

I take this opportunity of warning all those who contemplate making a pond to consider the matter

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

very seriously and *reconsider* it, unless their banking account is of the most substantial and elastic order.

The Old House belongs to the Marquis of Northampton and was held on a long lease by the late Mr. Wagstaffe, a wealthy gentleman then residing at Potton in Bedfordshire. I think he had a great sense of humour, for on the expiration of my lease, after living there for ten years and having spent a lot of money on the house and grounds, I asked him what he was going to allow me in consideration of the large sums of money I had expended on the pond, and, characteristic of his generosity, he replied that he had no wish to be hard on me, and as I had always been a trustworthy and respectable tenant, he would not compel me, as he was entitled by *law* to do, to "fill it up."

I frightened the gentleman to death by declaring I *would* fill it up, but I need hardly say I did not, for I had no intention of destroying the beauties of the pond, which time and nature had made so picturesque. So I let it remain as it was, and the next tenant had the benefit of it, but I believe the rent was raised.

Before I made the pond, my neighbour, Miss Minasi (the head of the high school for young ladies, a beautiful house next to mine) when she saw bricks and slates piled up in the garden half the length of the house, thought I was going to build a studio.

It is a very difficult matter to make a pond watertight. I had tried to do it before on a cheaper scale and hopelessly failed. Most of the excavations

## CANONBURY HOUSE

were dug out by Tom Heslewood — the eminent designer of costumes — and myself, and splendid exercise it was, but all the scientific and skilled work was done by King of Great Portland Street and his merry men, and for weeks and weeks my pretty garden resembled a brickfield. But when the pond was finished it was an enormous improvement, and to me worth everything it cost, which was several hundred pounds, — a fortune to me at that period.

My friend Tom Heslewood was staying with me at Canonbury and we were painting together in the daytime. I still had the "pond" fever very badly, and when later on I struck oil with a play called "The New Boy," I made plans for cutting a canal from the narrow end of the pond right up to the steps at the drawing room window, a distance of about sixty feet, and we started digging in earnest, but the business at the theatre suddenly fell off, and I wisely decided to abandon further enlargements of the pond, and we put the turf back in its place.

I don't know why, but we always kept a large stock of fireworks in a tool house at Canonbury; I used to buy up a quantity at a quarter the ordinary price a few weeks after the 5th of November, and on the slightest provocation a birthday was celebrated by the discharge of a rocket. One night, about twelve o'clock, Tom Heslewood and myself had just lighted a very fine large Roman candle which was throwing up coloured balls as high as the house, and one or two hit the staircase window of Miss Crease, one of my neighbours, whose house

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

looked on to my garden. Shortly afterwards an old alarm bell was set ringing at Miss Crease's house, then whistles were blown and policemen came rushing from every direction. One of them saw us from a wall he had mounted and shouted, "Burglars! If anyone gets over the wall into your garden, knock him down." "You do that, Heslewood," I said, "while I go round to the front of the house." Miss Crease had declared that burglars were on the staircase in her house with lights in their hands! We suddenly realised that it must have been *our fireworks* which had caused all the trouble and excitement. This she would n't believe for a moment and positively declared she had *seen* the men. It is marvellous what tricks the imagination will play one!

We celebrated that jovial, good natured comedian, Herbert Campbell's birthday, one night, and my servant, Smith, proceeded to light a huge Jack-in-the-box. It was one we had stored some time in the tool house and was damp, and directly he placed a light to it, it went off all at once and after the explosion there was nothing visible but a thick cloud of black smoke. Herbert Campbell said, "Where's Smith?" — we could n't see him, but we heard him say to his wife, "Mrs. Smith, have you got a big bit of sticking plaster?"

One night, on the eve of a dinner party I was giving, I heard a lot of mumbling and grumbling going on, so I quickly gathered that something had gone wrong. Presently I heard Mrs. Smith say to her husband, "It's not *my* fault. *You* had better tell the Master."

## BRANDON THOMAS

"No, Mrs. Smith, it's none of my business," he answered.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Hasn't the fish arrived, or have you upset the soup?"

"No sir, it's not that," said Mrs. Smith, almost crying. "You tell the Master, Smith."

"Come on, out with it," I said.

"Well, sir," sobbed Mrs. Smith, "Smith ought to have mentioned it early in the week and he forgot to do so. I know you'll be angry, but I'm sorry to say we've run short of fireworks!"

"What!" I said, "impossible!"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Smith, "there is only a packet or two of small squibs and a few catherine wheels, but not a rocket in the place," and she quite burst into tears.

"Disgraceful," I said. "Directly the cloth is removed for dessert, go to the Essex Road, and knock the people up if they have gone to bed, and procure some rockets. We *must* have some."

Smith was quite successful and after dinner we lighted up the neighbourhood — and roused it too!

It was at Canonbury that Brandon Thomas got an idea which he introduced into his famous play, "Charley's Aunt." I had had a dinner party and as the guests were leaving, Brandon whispered to me, "Old chap, could you lend me five shillings?"

I presumed he wanted it for a cab. "Delighted," I replied, but discovered I had no change. "One minute," I said, and got hold of Smith, who always carried about a bag with a goodish amount of silver therein. "Smith," I asked him, "have you got five shillings about you?"

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

"Yes, sir, certainly, sir," and he handed me a large new five-shilling piece. "I am rather glad to part with him, in a way; it's heavy and I would rather have it smaller, it's sometimes difficult to change," he said as I took it. I returned to Brandon and slipped the five-shilling piece into his hand. He thanked me and wished me good-night.

When all the guests had departed I observed Smith grinning, and he said, holding the five-shilling piece in hand, "I've got it back again, sir! See what Mr. Thomas gave me."

The Smiths remained with me a good long time after these events, and when they retired, several years after my marriage, they went to live in a charming little place of their own in Somersetshire, surrounded with cows, pigs, fowls, and ducks, to say nothing of a cart and horse, etc., and several acres of land. They are the most industrious couple I have ever known and well deserve to spend the remainder of their lives in peaceful comfort, but work is to them, I honestly believe, the very breath of life. They occasionally pay us a flying visit, one at a time, and Mrs. Smith manages somehow to see three plays, a Music Hall, and all the sights in the short space of a couple of days.

We once had a very nice couple as butler and cook, Mr. and Mrs. Adams. Adams had been at Blenheim, (I think in one of the lodges) but he took good care to let me know he had come from a *Palace*, and generally prefixed his remarks with: "When I was at Blenheim." We were giving a small dinner to Toole and some other old friends, and Adams, who had been in the house only a few



THE GARDEN OF THE OLD HOUSE, CANONBURY



## THE NEW BUTLER

days, became very fussy. He opened the champagne half an hour before dinner and corked it up again. "At Blenheim they didn't like the 'fizz' on the wine." "They" generally decanted it. When it was poured out it was as flat as hock and tasted very like it. Shortly before the guests arrived he came to me in great consternation. I was afraid he was going to have a fit.

"What's up?" I said.

He gasped, out of breath, "These girls" (the maids he was referring to) "have amazed me!"

"What about?" I asked.

"Sir," he said, "I have never had such an experience all the years I was at Blenheim."

"This is not Blenheim," I said. "There is very little resemblance. The house is not so big and not nearly so well pictured, and indeed the grounds are smaller."

"Quite so, sir," he answered, faintly smiling at my joke, "but surely I am not to be belittled by these bits of girls."

"Certainly not," I said. "What's the matter?"

"Well," said Adams, very much on his dignity, "surely, sir, you don't expect *me* to serve the vegetables. For that's what the report is in the kitchen."

"Certainly not," I replied. "I shall see how I feel. I shall probably serve them *myself!*"

Later on, when one of the maids said he was expected to light up the Roman candles while I was sending up the rockets, his disgust knew no bounds; but he was such a good chap that although I told him I didn't wish him to have anything to do with

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

the fireworks, unless he liked, he made a start on a Jack-in-the-box, and was so pleased with the result that it was all I could do afterwards to keep him off them. He was a demon at it!

Mrs. Clay-Ker-Seymer was very fascinated by my fireworks and would insist on firing off large squibs, and when I cautioned her to "let go" before the bang came, she replied, "Poor boy, I let off fireworks before you were born!" Just at that moment one burst in her hand, but even that did not deter her.

A very cheery cabman drove me home one night in a four-wheeler, and after having had a good look at me, he exclaimed, "Ah! I thought I was n't mistaken. It's Mr. Weldon Goldsmith, is n't it?"

"Yes," I replied, "that's near enough."

"Ah!" he went on, "I thought I was right. And," he continued, "it may interest you to know, sir, that my wife also used to be in the profession."

"Really," I said.

"Yes, indeed," he answered. "She used to swim in the tank at the Aquarium with the Beckwith family!!"

But, to return to the Court Theatre. After the run of "Aunt Jack," the next play to be produced was "The Cabinet Minister," by A. W. Pinero.

"Is there a part for me?" I inquired of Mrs. Wood.

"I hope so," she answered, "but I don't know. You had better go and see Pinero." I did so the next day, and was shown into his pretty little draw-



*Photo Elliott & Fry*  
**WEEDON GROSSMITH AS JOSEPH LEBANON IN "THE CABINET MINISTER"**



## A. W. PINERO

ing room in a charming house of the bijou type in St. John's Wood Road, opposite Lord's Cricket Ground, where he lived then.

Pinero said he feared there was no part for me, but having been prompted by Mrs. John Wood, I asked if there was n't the part of a money-lender in the play that might suit me. But Pinero answered there was such a part, but it was intended for Jack Clayton, and should be played by a big man. I was very obstinate, and said that the money-lenders I had met professionally and otherwise were mostly *small* men, and proceeded to give him *my* idea of how I should play and dress the up-to-date West End money-lender. I noticed, during my description, he never moved his eagle eyes from me, and they seemed to bore through me like a gimlet. "Very well," he said at last, "come down to-morrow and have a try! Rehearsal at eleven sharp." I left the house with the firm intention of holding on to him, like the Old Man of the Sea, and never letting go till I had played the part, *which I did*.

I think it was the best part I have ever played. I made the character a fashionable, rather vulgar, cheery man of business, and I am happy to say that no one appreciated the performance more than my Jewish friends, and I have many, and I never lost one of them through that performance, as it gave no offence to anyone.

I never saw Mrs. Wood to better advantage than as Lady Twombley. What a good cast it was! Arthur Cecil, Allan Aynsworth, Brandon Thomas as The Macphail (a superb performance), Herbert Waring, Mrs. Cecil Raleigh (then Miss Ellisen),

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

Eva Moore, and Rosina Philippi. It ran about ten months, and then Mrs. Wood put on "The Volcano," by Ralph Lumley, the author of "Aunt Jack." It was full of brilliant lines and much cleverer than "Aunt Jack," but the public didn't take to it, so it ran for only six weeks. There was a fine ballroom scene in the play, designed from a room in Dorchester House; it cost a large sum of money, for all the mouldings were in relief instead of simply being painted on in imitation, and the dresses were superb, but alas! "no good." The public didn't respond—I wonder whether this bad luck had anything to do with the name of the play, for I have invariably noticed that when the title of a play refers to anything concerning a disturbance of the elements it seldom proves a success; cases in point are "The Volcano," "The Thunderbolt," "The Whirlwind," "The Maelstrom," "The Cataract," "The Deluge," "Storm-bound," "Struck by Lightning," etc., and many others. I am not very superstitious, but whenever I see a play announced with a title similar to those I have quoted, I fear for the result.

As I have always felt it was a great privilege to play with Henry Irving and Beerbohm Tree, so I felt it was to have acted with Mrs. John Wood. What a delightful actress, what a sense of humour! She could make people laugh with her "yes" or "no," and her style was most original. She did n't get her laughter through physical deformities or making ugly contortions, for she was the most beautiful-looking creature, a fine figure, and she is still a most handsome woman. A beautiful woman is



*Photo Elliott & Fry*

JOSEPH LEBANON IN "THE CABINET MINISTER"



## AN ACCIDENT

always beautiful; it is not a question of age, but of intellect and expression. Mrs. John Wood's clear-cut delivery made every word as distinct to the back row of the pit or gallery, as it was in the front row of the stalls, which contributed not a little to her great popularity.

One night during the run of "Aunt Jack," a new "property man" had made up a barrister's brief which was used by me and Mrs. Wood, and by mistake he had made it extra heavy. In one scene of the play she had to thrust it out to her counsel (played by Eric Lewis), and I entering suddenly used to receive it on my head, my hat being knocked off,—a sure laugh with any audience, but on this occasion, whether I raised my head too quickly or she lowered her arm or what, I don't know, but this I do remember, and am not likely ever to forget: the heavy brief, as hard as a piece of wood, struck me a violent blow on the right ear. For a few moments I heard a curious singing in my ear, and then I could scarcely hear anything, not even the "cues." The audience roared with laughter, which I am sure they would n't have done had they known I was injured, and I was hurt very seriously; for on seeing my doctor the next morning he informed me that the drum of the ear was broken. In fact, there was a hole in it which would never heal up, *so he said*. He attended me for a week and said "nothing could be done." This indeed was a cheerful look-out, but I consulted Dr. Orwin, the famous aurist of Weymouth Street, who said that he believed with constant attention he could cure it, and his judgment was correct, for

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

in a month it had completely healed, and I have never had any trouble with it since. It was acknowledged to be a most remarkable cure.

There were no parts for either my friend Brandon Thomas or myself in the piece to follow, "The Late Lamented." The fortnight's notice was already up. On the Saturday night Brandon Thomas and myself at the fall of the curtain were packing up our make-up boxes, and talking about the work-house and other cheerful topics, and this suggested to Brandon Thomas to write the following poem, which, set to the tune of "The Wearin' o' the Green," he sang at all the Bohemian clubs whenever they had a sing-song, for years afterwards:

### TILL THE LAVES ARE OFF THE THREES

("*The Wearin' o' the Green*")

The notis is gone up, they say, thim Managers to plaize,  
We'll not be wanted back until the laves are off the threes,  
So go your ways an' starve, me boys, what care they for your  
pangs,

An' don't complain, or else you'll taste their managerial fangs.  
They've all a million pounds apiece, torn from us day by day,  
And now they turn their backs on us t' enjoy their holiday,  
They'll ate an' dhrink from morn till night, an' finish up wid  
cheese,

While we'll be starvin', waitin', till the laves are off the threes.

There's Misther Cecil goes to live in castles in the north,  
Wid Dhukes an' Lords an' all that goes to make life livin'  
worth;  
They'll feed him to his heart's content, an' giv' him lodgin's  
free,  
An' send him back just twice the size of starvin' you an' me;

## POETRY

An' while we're fadin' in the south, till chill October comes,  
An' sellin' this an' that to live, that used to deck our homes,  
Ould Arthur he'll be warblin' in thim castles by the says,  
Forgettin' that we're starvin' till the laves are off the threes.

There's Aynesworth swore he'd take himself a noble holiday,  
And sint away his huntin' kit to Oireland o'er the say;  
He also sent his fishin' thraps to Scotland in a van,  
An' all his guns and shootin' things unto the Isle of Man;  
But when he heard the crewel news, for "nine weeks or for  
more,"

"The Saints be with us all," and to himself he swore,  
"Bad luck to tyrant managers that goes away at aise;  
Look out for throuble, boys, whin thim same laves is off the  
threes."

There's me an' poor ould Weedon never that they'd go an'  
close,

An' what we're goin' for to do Saint Patrick only knows,  
Unless we find a pawn shop where the man loves works o' art,  
An' has a taste for literature, upon which he will part;  
An' Roma Cushla, whom a little starvin' would do good,  
Is goin' to feast more freely in the Halls of Ravenswood,  
While we, like poor neglected cats whin the fam'ly's by the  
says,

Are starvin', day by day, until the laves are off the threes.

There's Waring, he'll be tempted off the Lading Parts to play,  
In Tree's new piece, or Willard's, or p'raps to Americay,  
Maybe the Comedie Francaise — he has n't settled yet;  
He'll mount so high, his poor old pals he'll very soon forget.  
An' Saunders manes to keep himself bybettin' on a horse,  
The Prompter'll go to sleep, as Prompters always do, of course,  
An' Andy'll take his boys down where the sand is mixed with  
fleas,

But they'll come crawlin' back whin the laves are off the threes.

Well, we must trust unto the Power that thim in sorrow helps,  
But may it rest its kindest hand on gentle Mistress Phelps,

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

An' all the ladies, one by one, that share wid us the sack,  
May all their dhresses fit them whin they're afther comin'  
back.

An' them same Bloated Rulers, who have left us to our fate,  
I wish them all the health they 'll get from all they 'll dhrink  
and ate;

May they renew their strength to play both night and matinées,  
They 'll get a heartfelt welcome whin the laves are off the  
threes.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE TRIPLE BILL AT TERRY'S THEATRE,  
AND "THE CRUSADERS," BY HENRY  
ARTHUR JONES

AFTER "waiting out" some time and having no offers of engagements, in desperation Brandon and I decided to have a "little flutter" on our own. The ever good-natured Cecil Clay gave us permission to play "The Pantomime Rehearsal" in London, so we formed a Triple Bill by putting up "The Lancashire Sailor," written by Brandon Thomas, and "A Commission," written by myself, in front of it. And in "A Commission," we had the good fortune to secure the services of the beautiful and clever Lily Hanbury for the chief part. Charles Abud and George Edwardes found some capital (not much), and we started at Terry's Theatre on June 6, 1891. Everyone who came liked it, but they did n't come in sufficient numbers to make it pay. The Libraries, who had done a deal, got frightened — as they frequently do — and begged to be let off, and Edwardes, in fear of offending them, complied with their wishes, and at the end of the month we decided to "put up the shutters."

One day, just before the end had come, in rushed Abud, bringing with him a cheery friend, the late

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

Walter Pallant, who was ready to put up sufficient capital to sail the ship again for another month, and on we went merrily without a stop. We had to leave Terry's, so we moved to the Shaftesbury, but we were able to have that for only a few months, and another move had to be made to Toole's Theatre, now submerged into the Charing Cross Hospital. But Toole, returning from his provincial tour, obliged us to make another move, and on we went to the Court Theatre, and during that time we substituted other pieces in place of "The Lancashire Sailor" and "A Commission," always keeping "The Pantomime Rehearsal" in the bill as the *pièce de résistance*.

We produced "Good For Nothing," "Faithful James," by B. C. Stephenson, "The New Sub," by Brandon Thomas, which Seymour Hicks played in, and W. S. Gilbert's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstein," in which I played Hamlet, Brandon Thomas the King, Gertrude Kingston the Queen, W. G. Elliot and C. P. Little appeared as Rosencrantz and Guildenstein, and May Palfrey as the Player Queen; she was also playing in "A Commission" and "The Pantomime Rehearsal" in company with Beatrice Lamb, Gertrude Kingston, Ellaline Terriss, Edith Chester, and Rose Norreys, and, later on, both Decima and Eva Moore joined the company.

During the rehearsals of "A Commission" Abud brought down a young lady with instructions "from the front" that she was to play the small part of the maid. It is called "lumbering," and B. T. and myself resented ladies being "lum-

## THE TRIPLE BILL

bered " on to us simply because they were friends of a " backer." If she had suited the part it would n't have mattered, but she was of the type of an East End factory girl, with the airs of a bogus duchess and dressed to death — her furs alone would have paid for our production. She was very patronising, and as she shook my hand, she said, " I 've *oft-ten* heard of you, from a gentleman friend of mine who knows you personally. I suppose he 's met you at some Boemian Club." Her affected voice was quite unsuited to a simple lady's maid, and I asserted my rights as the author of the play, and objected to her on this ground. But it was no good. Abud said " it had to be." So Thomas and myself pocketed our pride and submitted gracefully, and Abud left us, telling the lady's coachman he " need n't wait," — for she possessed the usual " hard-earned brougham."

We offered her a seat on the stage, while we were arranging the easel and furniture for the scene which was to represent an artist's studio. Thomas's views were antagonistic to mine. He was " enthused " at that period by the influence of Whistler and his many satellites, and wanted the easel *up* stage, I wanted it *down*; he wanted the room dark, I wanted it light; and as I had written the play and was still painting portraits in my studio, I declared I knew more about an artist's studio than he did. This he denied. I regret to say we came to words, and we handed out some very uncomplimentary remarks to each other. The young lady was getting very impatient and was stamping her feet on the ground.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

I pushed the easel down stage, Thomas pushed it up. The war had continued for about ten minutes, when the young lady suddenly jumped up, screwed up her part, which she threw down on the floor, shouted "*Cads!*" and flounced out of the building, never to return. Thomas and myself stared at each other for a moment. The expression on our faces changed to mirth from anger. We roared with laughter and shook hands, congratulating ourselves on her departure.

Among the actors and actresses who played in "*The Pantomime Rehearsal*" and other items of the original Triple Bill in London were Gertrude Kingston, Carlotta Addison, Helena Dacre, and C. P. Little—a most admirable exponent of Jack Deedes and Wilfred Draycott as Sir Charles Grandison. Little left the stage some years ago to become a journalist and writer of fashionable intelligence on the staff of the *Daily Chatter Box* and other widely read journals, "equally well known but too numerous to mention here!" He is also an authority on men's clothes.

May Palfrey, as many of my readers know, is now Mrs. Weedon Grossmith in private life. Her father, Dr. James Palfrey, the eminent physician of Brook Street, died at the early age of fourty-four, and the heavy expenses which a physician with a large practice is bound to incur had not enabled him to provide adequately for his young family. His daughter May, after a course of study with Miss Florence Haydon (the well-known actress whose experience of the stage began at the time of the "*Great little Robson*," with whom she appeared

## THE TRIPLE BILL

in her very youthful days as a child actress), put her shoulder to the wheel and went on the stage, Augustus Harris giving her her first appearance at Drury Lane, an engagement which lasted over a year, during which she understudied Fanny Brough.

Later on she joined our Triple Bill, and two years afterwards, at the end of the run of "The New Boy," in which she so successfully played the part of "Nancy Roach," the school girl—she, much to the annoyance of several better-looking men (at least in their own estimation), married me, and, as the story books say, we "lived happily ever afterwards," with the addition of a charming little daughter to brighten a happy household.

Thinking the Triple Bill would terminate earlier than it did, I signed and settled to play in Henry Arthur Jones' play, "The Crusaders," and as there was a little difficulty in being in two places at once, it was arranged that I should play in "The Crusaders" for a month, which I did, opening there on November 2, 1891.

I played "Mr. Palsam," a narrow-minded, egotistical nonconformist or dissenter, an excellent part, but a most repulsive character. I note how he is described by the author. Mr. Palsam is "a thin, pale, weedy, nervous, unhealthy-looking little man, about thirty-five, very short-sighted, precise, fidgety and excitable, waspish, narrow-minded," mind you, and the author *wrote this part for me!* !

It was a fine cast, including Lady Monckton (who christened my brother and I Gee-Gee and Wee-Gee), Winifred Emery, Olga Brandon, Arthur

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

Cecil, Yorke Stephens, Lewis Waller, Henry Kemble, and Allan Aynesworth.

During my absence from the Triple Bill for a month, my part, Lord Arthur, in "The Pantomime Rehearsal," was taken first by Adolphus Vane Tempest, and afterwards by the late Compton Coutts. Both these gentlemen played the part admirably, but my partner, Brandon Thomas, who has always been absurdly prejudiced in my favour, sulked and pined for my return, so I rejoined the Triple Bill after five or six weeks and the part of Palsam in "The Crusaders" was then taken by Cyril Maude.

During the run of the Triple Bill an old friend came round, at the termination of "The Pantomime Rehearsal," to my dressing room and brought another man with him. He had never seen me on the stage, and knew me only as a painter. He expressed his great delight at our meeting, and I thoroughly reciprocated his feelings. He appeared very merry and kept on tapping me on the shoulder, saying, "Yes, my dear Weedon, we saw by your name on the bills that you were play-acting, and we came to see you, and we *paid* too, by Jove, did n't we?" appealing to his friend as if it were an unusual procedure for an old friend of an actor to pay for admission to a theatre.

"Yes, by Jove," he rattled on, "and if ever you come to Leeds you must lunch with us, what? Must n't he?"

"Rather," replied his friend.

I assured them I would run down one day to Leeds to lunch, and during a pause in the conversa-

## THE TRIPLE BILL

tion I asked him what he thought of me as an actor, — always an unwise question to ask a friend.

"I thought you were rather good, did n't I say so?" again appealing to his Yorkshire friend; and then he shook me by the hand very seriously, as he said, "Yes, very good indeed, but I *hope* you have n't give up your painting, Weedon!"

Brandon Thomas would sometimes come to my dressing room asking me for the loan of a sovereign. He used to leave his flat, which was just opposite the theatre, and not bother to see whether he had any money on him. He was a happy-go-lucky, careless, generous fellow in the early nineties, and would often come to the theatre without even the price of a cab fare in his pocket, but he was also the most remarkable exception to the ordinary borrower. He ALWAYS paid you back, and usually did so the next day.

One evening before the performance commenced, he entered my dressing room and said, "Weedon, could you lend me a couple of sovereigns?" This was rather a tall order for me in those days, but I looked in my pocket-book and found I had just that amount, which I gave him. He said, "I 'll pay you back to-morrow, but I want to take my cousin out to supper to-night, and have only a few shillings in my pocket." He added that his cousin from the North had seen the provincial companies play the "Triple Bill" several times, and was anxious to see how we played it in London. Thomas said, "Weedon, play up, do your best, I want to show my cousin who is in the stalls, HOW 'The Pantomime Rehearsal' ought to be played." I always make a

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

point of doing my best, and abstain from fooling or over-acting, even if it's a bad house, for I always think that that is the time one should put out extra energy, and repay the few people who have had the good taste to select your play from among so many others. However, if I did make any difference on this particular occasion, it was to play up extra well. It was a full house and the piece never went better.

After we had finished I went to my room. Brandon and his Northern relative went into his, which was just opposite mine; his door was open and I could hear a good deal of their conversation, and I am bound to say I was rather anxious to know the verdict.

I heard Brandon say, "I'm glad you think we're not bad," and his friend replying, "Not a bit of it. I think you were all jolly good, but the provincial company made so much *more* of everything. For instance, the man who played your part was a first-rate dancer." (This is exactly what he ought *not* to have been in the part of Captain Tom Robinson.)

I heard Brandon say in his most satirical manner, "No, I don't dance," and his relative replied, "No, I could see that, it's a pity, but the other chap who played in the country jumped all over the place, and put in a splendid song about 'I'm full up to here, with whiskey and beer, oh dear, oh dear!' You ought to see him, it's worth a day's journey."

As he became more and more hilarious with the thought of the provincial company, Brandon was getting quieter and quieter and very much on his dignity, and in a cold and distant manner asked

## THE TRIPLE BILL

whether Weedon Grossmith could "compare favourably with the provincial actor," and the hilarious one replied, "I thought Weedon Grossmith very good indeed, but he's not a touch on the little chap in the 'Provs.' Weedon Grossmith says 'What rot!' only three or four times, and the other cove says it a couple of dozen times *at least*. I tell you, if they are anywhere near London, you take my tip and go and see them — you 'll get some hints."

There was a lull in the conversation after this last tactless remark, then I heard them wishing each other good-night.

Ten minutes later Brandon came into my room, looking a little depressed, and putting the two sovereigns he had borrowed of me quietly down on my dressing table, said, "Good-night, old chap, and thank you for the little loan, but I shall not want it now. I am not going out to supper to-night!!"

## CHAPTER XVII

“THE GUARDSMAN,” BY G. R. SIMS AND CECIL RALEIGH; “THE AMAZONS,” BY ARTHUR PINERO; “THE NEW BOY,” BY ARTHUR LAW. W. S. PENLEY

OCTOBER 20, 1898, at the Court Theatre, Arthur Chudleigh produced “The Guardsman,” by G. R. Sims and Cecil Raleigh, in which I played a fashionable, vulgar racing-man of wealth who drove a coach. My clothes for this play, which had to be rather smart and sporting, cost me forty pounds; they were made by Cooling & Lawrence, who have a reputation for smartness, but not cheapness, and as the play ran only six weeks, and the clothes were of no use to me for private wear (not having a coach), it was a costly outlay. I mention this sordid detail only to illustrate the fact that it is *not* “all profit and no loss” on the business side of the actor’s calling.

The cast included Caroline Hill, Ellaline Terriss, Mrs. Cecil Raleigh, W. G. Elliot, C. P. Little, Compton Coutts, and Arthur Cecil. This was followed by a revival of “The Pantomime Rehearsal,” which evidently came too soon, as it failed to draw.

On March 7, 1893, Arthur Chudleigh produced

## "THE AMAZONS"

"The Amazons," by A. W. Pinero. The cast included Lily Hanbury, Ellaline Terriss, Pattie Brown, Rose Le Clerq, Fred Kerr, W. G. Elliot, and myself. I have always thought "The Amazons" one of the finest farces Pinero has written. It is a delightful mixture of fun and romance; the first two acts, taking place in the woods of "Overcote," are, with all the realistic autumn effects, delightfully pretty, the stage being strewn with real autumn leaves. The run lasted about five months.

Since writing the foregoing, Mr. Charles Frohman has revived "The Amazons," at the Duke of York's Theatre, June 14, 1912. After a period of nineteen years I have had the pleasure of resuming my original part in this delightful play and have also had the experience of playing it as the only "original" member of the cast, which in the present instance included the Misses Ellis Jeffreys, Neilson-Terry, Marie Löhr, Pauline Chase, Ruth MacKay, and Messrs. Dion Boucicault and Godfrey Tearle. We played to record houses all through the season.

At the conclusion of the run of "The Amazons" in 1893 Arthur Chudleigh produced "The Other Fellow," in September, translated by Mr. Fred K. Horner from the French of "Champignol malgré lui." The action took place in France, and the late Charles Groves and myself played the parts of a couple of civilians serving their term of conscription. I remember the French uniforms were very heavy, and the rifles with the long bayonets still heavier. The cast also included Ellaline

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

Terriss, Pattie Brown, and Charles Brookfield — now joint licenser of plays, with another of my much valued old friends, Ernest Bendall.

It was transferred to the Old Strand Theatre November 18, but failed to attract there. I was out of work, had no offers, and things were looking rather bad. My entire savings, after my debts had at last been paid, amounted to a few hundred pounds, which was all deposited in the Birkbeck Bank, then facing the terrors of a "run."

I never removed a penny of my money, although I witnessed the frightened multitude of people, many from the country, pushing, rushing, and fighting to get to the counters in their eagerness to withdraw their savings; and many of them, emerging from the crush and gaining the street, hot and faint with fatigue, had the bags containing their money snatched from them by thieves who had surrounded the building in the hope of plundering these foolish and timid people.

The first step I thought I had better take with a view to retrenching was to let my house at Canonbury; consequently, I put an advertisement in the newspapers to facilitate that purpose, but one afternoon, Arthur Law arrived at The Old House with a play in his pocket that he wished to read to me. It was called "Master Freddie," but was afterwards rechristened "The New Boy." The title was suggested by Jocelyn Brandon, the Solicitor, (L.C.C.,) a very good judge, and an admirable critic of a play.

After reading the piece there was no hesitation on my part. I decided to do it, and as soon as

## "THE NEW BOY"

possible. Jocelyn Brandon found a "backer," *i. e.*, a gentleman to finance it, and off we started with rehearsals.

The cast included Misses Gladys Homfrey, Alice Beet, Esmé Beringer and May Palfrey, John Beauchamp, J. D. Beveridge, Kenneth Douglas, Sidney Warden and C. Volpé. I also engaged Mr. Alex Henderson as my acting manager.

It was very difficult to get a *real boy* of the age of fourteen or fifteen to play the part of "Bullock major," the bully of the school, for, although a bully, he had to be a gentleman with the stamp of the public school upon him. We tried several, but they were not right. Then one day Miss Maud Millett (now Mrs. Tennant) brought a young step-brother of hers in an Eton jacket and tall hat and suggested him for the part.

He rehearsed on approval. One rehearsal was sufficient for me to decide that he was made for the part, he was literally "*It*." We had to worry him a bit, poor chap, but it was all in the way of kindness and art, and he was rewarded for his patience and perseverance by making a great hit, in my opinion the hit of the play, and many of his old friends, including my wife, have called him "Bullock" ever since, and know him by no other name. I refer to Kenneth Douglas, who has become a fine actor and a great favourite with the public. May Palfrey also made a great success as the school girl, Nancy Roach.

We tried the play "on the dog" at Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne, February 1, 1894, Folkestone, and Leamington, and lost money at all

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

these places. But we opened in London at Terry's Theatre, February 21, 1894, and at the third performance turned away money, which pleasant process was repeated at every subsequent performance. But we opened in London at Terry's to make way for a burlesque, so I took a lease of the Vaudeville Theatre from April 16, 1894, and played to crowded houses right through the entire season; the "run" lasted for fourteen months.

My "backer" put up a thousand pounds; only five hundred was used, which was repaid him the first week, and he took as his share of the profits about fifteen thousand pounds.

At the end of the run of "*The New Boy*" I married May Palfrey, and after a honeymoon of about five days returned to town and opened with "*The Lady's Idol*," by Arthur Law, in March, 1895. In this play I played the part of a fashionable society singer, and my wife that of the domesticated wife who was a professional dancer. My first line on entering was, "Well, Polly, how's the baby?" received with shouts of laughter from a crowded house, which rather embarrassed me, naturally never seeing the joke in that light.

It was a long and expensive cast, with costly dresses and scenery, and was not a pecuniary success, and it was a great disappointment to us all.

I followed this by another farce, "*Poor Mr. Potton*," by C. Hamlyn and H. M. Paull, in October, 1895. This farce made the public roar with laughter, but they did not come in sufficient numbers to make it pay, so after six or seven weeks of uneven business, first up and then down, I put up

## "POOR MR. POTTON"

the shutters, which is invariably my habit when nothing is coming into the till, and said, "Next, please."

The idea of "Poor Mr. Potton" was Mr. Hamlyn's, and I got Mr. H. M. Paull to write in some love scenes, but the bulk of the play was written by myself, though I never put my name to it, which, under the circumstances, I was not sorry for. Several of my friends, on coming round to my dressing room, and being asked their opinion of the play, did n't improve matters by saying, "Well, *I liked it, I did, really.*" And the climax was reached one night at the Beefsteak Club, where I had been confiding to a few members at the dinner table just before I was leaving that I had really written the play, when Sir Augustus Webster came in (he had been to my theatre the night before, and I had noticed him shifting about in his stall and looking generally bored). I reminded him of this fact, saying, "I'm afraid you did n't care for me last night" (a stupid thing to have said).

He looked a little embarrassed, and then commenced to ladle out many compliments on my acting, and said, "My dear Weedon, I have seen you in everything you have played, and there is no actor on the stage I admire more than yourself. Your performance, as usual, was splendid, first-rate, but what drove me to tears was the *play!* But that was n't *your* fault, you did n't write the d——d thing." Amid roars of laughter I made a rapid exit, leaving the others to explain.

I am not one of those actors who must always be acting for the love of acting, nor does the class

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

of part that has been allotted to me foster in me this overwhelming love of the Art!

I don't make my entrance on the top of an oak staircase in answer to a call for help from some female in distress, with sword in hand, my abundant black ringlets hanging over my shoulders, with shimmering breastplate of armour, and picturesque costume — designed by Macquoid or Heslewood — looking ever so much better on the stage than I have ever looked off it, and with a flourish of my well-polished sword challenge half a dozen desperadoes to "dare lay a hand on the poor outcast woman, whose sorrow and downfall have been caused by the accursed parasites that stand before me," "One step forward, and by God's help, my iron will pass through your ribs," and terminate by saying, "Gentlemen, I am for you." (They fight.)

Not a bit of it. This is what would lead up to my entrance, if I have an entrance, (I am frequently "*discovered*" with my back to the audience,) period, modern dress.

The Juvenile, an artist, is saying to the heroine, "Then is it really good-bye, Lettie? You know, dear little girl, what this means to me. Hope, ambition, everything, thrown to the winds. What have I now left to live for? And do you care for this man, Plackett? Can he ever make you happy?"

Lettie replies, "Oh, don't, Horace, you are *too* cruel. You know of my poor father's losses. The dear old mills were sold over his head, and the old house and garden where we played as children," (music) "together must go to — unless — unless — "



THE ORIGINAL DRAWING FOR LORD TWEENWAYS IN "THE AMAZONS"  
*Drawn by Arthur Pinero*



## MY CLASS OF PART

"Yes, unless what?" says the Juvenile.

"Unless," replies Lettie, "unless I marry Mr.—"  
(This is my entrance.) "*Enter Mr. Plackett.*" He is described in the part as "a cadaverous, over-dressed cad, with a pale face and weak-looking eyes, and is puffing a cigar in a pretentious manner." He leans over the gate, not seeing the Juvenile, and says, "'Ullo, Lett! You and I, nobody by, what?" Then he sees the poor Juvenile. "I did n't see you. My gain, your loss. Hook! Twig! Two's com, three's none. Get your hair cut!"

The Juvenile clenches his fists and retires.

Plackett grins, puffs smoke, and continues, "Well, Lett, has the old man come to his senses?"

Lettie (nearly crying). "Old man!"

Plackett. "Yes, your father. Is it me and you and happiness, and the old house and grounds are still yours, or do I foreclose the mortgage on the estate and you marry your canvas-spoiling friend, and 'hash it' for dinner forevermore, amen. Will you marry me?"

Lettie. "I can never *love* you, but—I will marry you." (She cries.)

Plackett. "All right, that's a bit to go on with." This example is in no way an exaggeration of what is expected of *me*, or of many of the parts I have played.

A few years ago a friend of mine, a popular romantic actor, was astonished that my daughter had never seen me act. I have often seen his children leaning out of a box, loudly applauding their father's noble deeds all through the evening, and I have no doubt they regarded him in the same

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

noble light *off* the stage. But how could my young daughter applaud and respect me in such parts as Paulsam, Joseph Lebanon, Lord Huntworth, and many contemptible cowards who are frightened at their own shadows? I am perfectly sure the public estimate you by the parts you play — why not your children too?

As an instance of this, when I was playing Joseph Lebanon the money-lender in Pinero's "Cabinet Minister," the Countess of (but no matter) invited me to supper at her house. She said she had heard that my brother and myself had done a ten minutes' sketch of "a dentist and his patient" and wanted us to amuse her guests. She knew my brother, but had only seen me as Joseph Lebanon, and was in a mortal funk as to what my manners would be like *off* the stage, and whether I was fit to appear in her drawing room amongst her distinguished guests.

I received the invitation and promptly declined it, for I am not in the habit of paying for my salt when I'm asked out to dinner or lunch, as on this occasion I was expected to do.

If I recited or acted at society gatherings I should do so professionally and should expect to be paid for my services, but it is a class of work that has never appealed to me. But nothing has pleased me more than to "do something" (as it is called) among my intimate friends, and the only time it has given me pain (I'm not thinking about the feelings of the audience) was when I was doing this tooth-drawing act with my brother at our old friend Sam Heilbut's. In the final struggle we contrived

## CHARLES MORTON'S ADVICE

to knock over a valuable vase, worth a hundred pounds, and smashed it to pieces. We were most concerned, but our good-natured host only laughed and said, "It's my own fault; that's all through not paying your artistes."

By this time I was begining to find continuous management had about as much certainty of producing a steady income as there is in backing horses. Especially does this apply to the production of farces. It is as much an exception for a farce to "catch on" as for a musical comedy to have a short run.

I met the late Charlie Morton one evening — he was then the manager of the Palace Music Hall — and on being asked by him how I was doing, I replied, "Only fairly well financially, but artistically my play was a great success." I enlarged for some time on the precariousness of theatrical management.

Morton heaved a long sigh and exclaimed, "Ah! You must persevere, my lad."

"I do," I answered. "My entire life is given to it. My time is not my own; when I am not acting, I am rehearsing, reading plays, and attending to the wretched business part of theatrical life; in fact, I am working from morning till night."

Morton was still unmoved, and again persisted that it was all a matter of "perseverance," and he continued, "My lad, you have had several big successes in farce under your management, and —"

"Yes," I interrupted, "and several failures, plays that have not drawn money, and I've lost heavily, although —"

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

"Quite so," Morton resumed. "It's a matter of *perseverance*. I have been connected 'on and off' with theatrical business for nearly forty years, and my experience tells me that if an actor-manager only perseveres, with continuous management, he is bound, in the end, to *lose every penny he has ever saved!* He has only to *persevere* and he will finish up with a 'Benefit!'"

Having taken the wind out of my theatrical sails, he continued his pessimistic speech by saying, "The actor-managers who have made sufficient to retire on in this country you could count on the fingers of one hand, and those little fortunes have generally been acquired in America!"

I was walking one day down Kensington Gore with Lady White, the widow of the late Sir Thomas White. We had been chatting freely on the subject, I think, of "The Abolition of Man," and had entered upon a philosophical discussion which was far beyond my poor intellect to grasp, when the argument was brought to a speedy termination by a scream from my companion. Thinking she had been struck on the leg by a passer-by, though naturally distressed, I admit I was positively glad to be in a position to do the "heroic act," and grasping my stick I shouted, "Who did this?" But on Lady White putting her hand to her side, where she was struck, a bullet dropped from the folds of her dress on to the pavement. It was evidently the result of some fool having fired a pistol in the air, not thinking that the bullet has to descend somewhere or other. I was relieved to find it had not hurt her, and we proceeded to Bond



*Photo Alfred Ellis*  
WEEDON GROSSMITH AS "THE NEW BOY"





*Photo Hills & Saunders*

WEEDON GROSSMITH AND KENNETH DOUGLAS IN "THE NEW BOY"



## "THE ROMANCE OF A SHOPWALKER"

Street to visit Cheiro, the famous palmist, who, at her suggestion, was going to read my hand. He fortunately did n't know me, which made it more interesting. He examined my hand carefully and certainly told me *many things that afterwards came true*, and among others that there was a lot of money coming to me in the near future. I was glad to hear this, for it was quite foreign to me. He said he could not tell from whence it was coming, but it was there. I asked him his fee. He said he was not allowed to charge, but I observed a large bowl on the table containing a good many sovereigns and a few half-sovereigns. I took the hint.

About six months afterwards Arthur Law read me "The New Boy," and Cheiro's prediction proved right!

I have read as many as two hundred farces or comedies in a year and not found one winner amongst them. At the termination of the run of "Poor Mr. Potton," while the late Robert Buchanan was writing me a comedy called "The Romance of a Shopwalker," and having no play to put on as a stop-gap, I had to close the theatre for several weeks, and besides the expense of the rent of the theatre, and several salaries to pay, I had the additional rent of a house in South Street, Park Lane, as well as my old house at Canonbury.

The cast of "The Romance of a Shopwalker" included, among others, my wife (May Palfrey,) the late Miss M. A. Victor, Nina Boucicault, the late Sidney Brough, and David James, Jr., and Miss Annie Hill.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

The play made no money, so after a couple of months I "put up the shutters" and again said, "Next, please."

It took me time to discover that continuous management was not a "bed of roses" or a life of sunshine. So I threw up the managerial sponge for a while, and in the autumn of 1896 was very pleased to accept an engagement to play under the management of George Alexander (now Sir George) in a piece called "The Little Dodge." Other members of the company were Miss Ellis Jeffreys, Fred Terry, and the late Alfred Maltby.

I don't know how it benefited George Alexander's pocket, but it kept me free from anxiety for several months and I had a most pleasant time.

I then had an offer from Arthur Chudleigh to play in a four-act comedy by the late Ralph Lumley, called "Belle Bellair," at the Avenue Theatre (now the Playhouse). Chudleigh engaged me at a very substantial salary.

The cast of "Belle Bellair" was headed by Mrs. John Wood, and it also included Miss Irene Vanbrugh, Martin Harvey, Gillie Farquar, and a very handsome lady, Miss Fitzroy, who bore a remarkable likeness to Mrs. Langtry (now Lady de Bathe).

It was a well-written and entertaining play, but, alas, the public did not respond.

A few days after we opened, at the invitation of one of the "backers" of this play, I went with him to Farnham, to fish for trout, and while we whipped the stream, he talked of the piece and asked me what I thought of the "business" it was doing.



*Photo W. & D. Downey*

WEEDON GROSSMITH AS "HAMLET"



## W. S. PENLEY

I replied that I was not aware of the amount of the returns, as when just playing at a salary and taking no share in the management (or profits), I considered it an impertinence on the part of an actor to ask questions on this subject, and also very bad policy, as I had found out on the only occasion I had made this error of judgment and good taste, for in answer to my inquiries as to the "business" my then manager had replied, "It's awfully nice of you to take an interest in my affairs, and I am sure your reason is a sympathetic one, so I don't mind telling you that we are losing *heavily* every week, and as your salary is the highest in the company, you would greatly relieve our responsibility if you would play for *half*. Of course I should *never* have asked you such a thing if you had not seemed so interested and so distressed to hear of the bad houses we are playing to; your sympathy enables me to take advantage of your kindness if you will permit me to do so?" Well — he *did*.

When the "backer" of "Belle Bellair" told me the figures we were then playing to, I was so shocked that I lost a big fish by jerking the line, and my embarrassment was greatly increased by being asked for "my advice" as to whether it would be best to continue the run or close the theatre. I replied that "as an *actor* my advice is, run the play for six months, as a manager put up the shutters as soon as ever you can." He adopted my *managerial* advice and closed on the following Saturday, after a run of ten nights!

Shortly after this episode I produced, in conjunction with W. S. Penley ("The Private Secre-

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

tary" and "Charley's Aunt"), a farce called "The MacHaggis," by J. K. Jerome and Eden Phillpotts, at the Globe Theatre, now defunct. This was a very original and funny piece, and deserved a longer life than it enjoyed; perhaps it came ten years too soon — the London public are enthusiastic at the present moment about an entirely Scotch play — and "The MacHaggis" was only Scotch in places or perhaps I should say *parts*, and any and every one could understand it. It will always be a mystery to me why "The MacHaggis" did not run a year at least.

It was owing to the enormous success of "Charley's Aunt" that Penley retired from the stage, and I consider his absence from it a very great loss to the public; he was a most original comedian, his methods were entirely his own, he imitated no one though hundreds have imitated him. It was impossible to refrain from laughter when he was on the stage.

I believe it was the intention of Brandon Thomas, the author of "Charley's Aunt," that the play should contain a larger element of comedy, as opposed to actual farce, than it did when it was produced in London, and Thomas expressed his annoyance to me that during the trial trip in the provinces Penley had "converted his *Comedy* into a d— Farce"; however, it eventually made the fortunes of both Author and Actor.

After "The MacHaggis" had retired, I played in "Miss Francis of Yale" at the same theatre, and a rather amusing incident occurred one evening. One of the characters played by the late Miss Ethel



MAY LEVER PALFREY IN "THE NEW BOY"



## WOODCOTE PRINCE

Hope (the wife of E. B. Norman, our manager, who produced the play) suspected burglars to be lurking in her grounds, and gave the order to "let loose the dog," and loud barking and other "dog noises" — imitated by the call boy and prompter at the wing — followed. Then a splendid bull terrier (my own Woodcote Prince) dashed across the stage in pursuit of Arthur Playfair and Reeves Smith, the two juveniles, who had to appear frightened to death. On this particular occasion Woodcote Prince rushed on, and made for the footlights, sat down in the centre of the stage and quietly scratched his ear, then got up, wagged his tail (which was *not* docked), and quietly trotted off on the wrong side of the stage, apparently much pleased with himself, but judging from the sounds which came from the Royal Box, not nearly so pleased as his late Majesty Edward VII, who loudly applauded Woodcote Prince, but I did not allow him to take a call at the end of the act. I may add that I have never heard his late Majesty laugh more heartily than on this occasion. Just as the play was getting well established and being talked about — always a splendid advertisement — the public body, who were responsible for such work in those days, took up the whole road and the pavement round the theatre — this went on for weeks, and in bad weather — what play could stand against it? Poor E. B. Norman had put a good deal of his own money into the enterprise, but it all went, literally into the gutter. The theatre had to close. I said, "Next, please."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### LORD BLYTH'S DINNER PARTY TO THE PRINCE OF WALES. THE SAVAGE CLUB. ARTHUR ROBERTS

ON May 16, 1897, I dined at Lord Blyth's — then Sir James Blyth — at 33 Portland Place, to meet H. R. H., the Prince of Wales and Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar, and after dinner we smoked and chatted in the drawing room while H. R. H. played at cards with Lord Morris, Sir Walter Gilbey, and, I think, our host. He won about fifteen pounds and seemed quite delighted. During the evening I was looking for something to smoke when His Royal Highness most kindly offered me a cigar from his case. I very highly appreciated the compliment and slipped the cigar in my pocket and took another from somewhere on a table to smoke, determined to keep the one presented by the Prince as an heirloom and a souvenir of an evening to be remembered. I seldom smoke cigars and sometimes when I have a cigar given me, I put it in a drawer or a cabinet, and if I run short and some one wants one, I look about and can frequently find one.

My friend Mr. Edward Michael, who for many years was my trusty and trusted manager, is very fond of a good cigar, and when he comes to lunch

## A ROYAL CIGAR

I have too frequently discovered to my regret that I have forgotten to order a new box and I am out of cigars, I go on the rampage looking in holes and corners for one of my friends' presents to me to give to Michael. One day he came to see me and after lunch I was chaffed as usual by him about forgetting to lay in a large stock of cigars. I knew I had some somewhere and commenced to search, and on opening a private bureau I almost at once discovered a beauty, which I gave to Michael.

"That's a good 'un, Weedon," he said after smoking a few whiffs and seemed to thoroughly enjoy it, and I only discovered later to my intense disgust that I had given him the cigar that I had been treasuring up, the one presented to me by "the first gentleman in the land." I didn't get much sympathy from Michael afterwards when I told him of my misfortune; he roared with laughter, and declared that things in this life balanced themselves and that, "what was one man's loss was another man's gain," and he hoped in the future that I would cultivate society more than I had in the past if only for *his* sake, for he liked *good* tobacco.

When Mr. Henry Gold married one of Lord Blyth's daughters I was anxious to give her a little wedding present, not the ordinary kind such as a toast rack, egg boiler, or an engraving of "The Squire's Daughter" in a plush frame, and knowing she somewhat favoured "the old," I was determined to give her something good. I went to the north of London where I could occasionally pick up the genuine thing, and I hied me to Clapton, through the

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

pretty village (if one may so call it) of Stoke Newington where the New River meanders through Clissold Park. About a mile and a half further I remembered I had once bought a fine old teapot at a private house, where they had two or three little things in the front window. The door was locked as usual, but after knocking hard it was opened a little way with the chain still up. The elderly owner, on seeing me for the second time, said, "Oh, it's you, is it? Come in," and admitted me and shut the door. I informed him that I was on the lookout for something *old* and *good*, and he replied, "Then I've just got what you want," and produced a very fine old barometer. It was in excellent condition, and I doubt whether I have seen a better one of the kind. I thought it would make a capital little wedding present, and on hearing what he wanted for it I settled with him on the spot. It was exceedingly cheap and I could n't refrain from telling him so, though it was quite unusual for me to be so undiplomatic. He looked at me very straight, and verified my remark by saying, "Yes, it *is* cheap, but I *got it cheap*, and for a quick sale I can sell it cheap," and with a piece of brown paper wrapped round it I carried it back to Canonbury, where I was living, and sent it on to Portland Place with my best wishes.

A few days afterwards I saw Lord Blyth, and he told me that his prospective son-in-law was more than delighted at my present, for it was absolutely "the image of their old barometer that had been stolen from them a short time previously, and in fact, if they did n't know to the contrary,

## AUTOGRAPH-HUNTING

they would have thought it was the same one." I was very gratified at having made such a good selection, and my wife advised me to look up the old man near Clapton again and see if he had anything else worth having. I went there, and although it was only a couple of days later, the house was closed, barred up, and a board announced "To let," and on inquiry from a neighbour I heard that the owner had "gone in the night," leaving no address.

The autograph-hunting fiend I regard as a pest and a nuisance, and I am glad to say the fever is dying out. About eight years ago the craze was at its height: the autograph hunter does not bother me much because I don't play noble parts, but I expect I had a good many applications for my signature, for I generally charged sixpence or a shilling and was able to contribute about five pounds a year to the 'Actors' Benevolent Fund from this source. One day during the run of "The Man from Blankley's" at the Haymarket, as I left the stage door in Suffolk Street, I was accosted by a young lady with book and stylo pen in hand, who asked me for my autograph. I acceded with pleasure and asked her for a few stamps for the A. B. Fund in exchange. She seemed quite distressed, and said she really *could n't* afford it; she had had to pay half a crown for Lewis Waller's and one and sixpence for Martin Harvey's, which made it very expensive to collect. I told her as mine was not so valuable — as I do not play romantic parts — I only asked for a few stamps. She seemed worried, and hesitated, and after some consideration said, "I'll tell you what I *will* do.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

I hear that you are also an artist, so if you will draw me a nice sketch in my book and sign it, I will give you sixpence!" I raised my hat and thanked her and continued on my way. The worm will turn; so sometimes will the comedian.

### THE SAVAGE CLUB

Personally I very much preferred the Savage Club when it was a one-room club in the days when it was located at Haxell's in the Strand, or at the Savoy when members met entirely for conversation, without the addition of card-playing, which I consider drove us into our present palatial premises, where the members are now scattered, many in the billiard rooms, dozens in the cardrooms, some in the dining-room, and a few in the bar! by far the most cheery corner of the Club.

We leased Nos. 6 and 7 Adelphi Terrace, which were built by those famous architects, the brothers Adam, with the Pergolesi swags and the Angelica Kauffman ceilings, and converted the two large rooms on the first floor into one huge dining-room facing the Thames, one of the finest sites in London; but the adjoining house had only a plain ceiling, so at great expense they copied the original in No. 6 to match, and spent a large sum of money in various improvements. And to pay for the great outlay that these many alterations incurred, it was decided to elect two hundred and fifty new members. So, whenever any of the newly elected members criticised the manners and ways of the old members, which some of them were rather



MRS. WEEDON GROSSMITH



## THE SAVAGE CLUB

fond of doing, the old members, instead of retaliating, simply pointed to the new Adam ceiling to recall to the recently elected *why* they were elected at all. There is no occasion to say anything sarcastic or bitter, it is far better to point to the ceiling, and I am bound to admit that the new members can take chaff as well as the old, and the response is generally, "Waiter, attend to these gentlemen."

E. J. Odell, who is now comfortably quartered in the Charterhouse, is and has been for thirty-five years a landmark at the Savage Club, and is almost as active and jolly now as he was when he first good-naturedly used to entertain the Savages and their guests at the Saturday night dinners with his clever and curiously original recitations, and no man has ever "paid for his salt" more fully than Odell has done on those Saturday evenings. Odell really belongs to the Dr. Johnson and Boswell days, and I am sorry for what Johnson and Boswell missed in not knowing Odell. A thorough bohemian, very proud, poor, and independent, with the most original manner conceivable.

It was always a mystery where Odell lived, and certainly not our business to pry into this matter, but I, like other inquisitive busy-bodies, was desirous of discovering his place of abode. Some declared he lived north, near the Nag's Head, Holloway; others swore he resided at Fulham.

I was determined to solve this mystery, a very great impertinence on my part, but I was an old Savage and we have no laws of etiquette, so when a brother Savage and myself were leaving the Club

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

at two in the morning in company with Odell, we determined to see him home.

When we got into the Strand, Odell, probably bored with our society, said, "I'll wish you good-night." We were not going to be choked off like this and we asked him which way he was going. He replied, "Not *your* way, I'm going north. Good-night." We replied that *we* were going north also and we could all go together. So we wandered towards the Pentonville Road. He suddenly said, "Now, I'll wish you good-night." We asked him whether he lived there, and he replied, "No, I thought *you* did. I live in the opposite direction. I had hoped I was going to have a cigar with you. However, I think we can get what we want here"; and he tapped at a side door of a public house, and curiously enough we were admitted. After a little refreshment we all three left, and as Odell said *he* was going down to Charing Cross, we said that that was *our* way and we would accompany him. It was past three when we got near Maiden Lane, Strand, the Spooferies Club, I fancy it was. Then suddenly he said, "I'll wish you good-night. I'm going into this Club for five minutes." We suggested that we should come with him for that five minutes. "Sorry," he answered, "guests are not admitted." We found out afterwards this was not the truth.

He wished us good-night, and then, with a diabolical grin on his face, he hissed out, "And *now* you don't know where I live," and left us on the pavement, looking and feeling very foolish. In the old days of the Savage at Savoy Mansions one

## THE SAVAGE CLUB

of our popular members, James Albery, the author of "The Two Roses" and many other successful plays and books, had been in bad health for some time and his sight was a little affected.

One evening he brought in several guests, and seeing me in dress clothes and not recognising me for a moment, mistook me for the waiter and ordered me to fetch certain drinks. I smiled at him and naturally did not obey his instructions.

When he found he was not being served, he got up with his friends and left the Club, very much disgusted with the inattention of the "waiter." A few days afterwards he came in the Club and was complaining of his sight. I then reminded him that a night or two previously he had mistaken me for the waiter. "Oh yes," he said, "to be sure, I did. I remember now, but I made that all right the following day—I apologised to the waiter."

I don't suppose anyone was more liked in the Club than Arthur Mathison, but he always imagined it was the reverse. He always had a grievance. He certainly was very unfortunate, and although a very hard worker and an abstemious man, had always great difficulty in making two ends meet. Poor chap, he never had any money and was always hard up. His requirements were very modest, but he never made sufficient to provide even for his very small wants.

One evening he came into the little writing-room in a state of absolute despair, and in contrast to his misery heard the roars of laughter and jollity coming from the big room beyond.

'A great event was being celebrated. We had

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drawn the tickets for the Derby Sweepstake, and Proctor, the artist and well-known cartoonist, had drawn the first prize of fifty pounds, and was reminded by Charley Yates that the custom was to stand champagne at once all round, which Proctor was delighted to do.

At this moment Mathison entered the room looking at his worst. Proctor, in a short speech punctuated by the popping of corks, kept alluding to the fact that his luck was "so unexpected." He said, "I put down my sovereign and said good-bye to it, I regarded it as gone, gone for *ever*, and now I find myself with fifty pounds in notes *in my hand*, as if they had dropped from the clouds."

These were dangerous remarks to make at the Savage Club in those days, or in fact at any club. "Waiter," continued Proctor, "open plenty of wine," which was done. We all drank to each other, and Proctor, who was getting quite flushed, was breaking into Scotch songs on French wine. Imagine the mixture. Several people, I think, must have come in from the street. They were certainly not members of the Club, but they all drank freely of Proctor's wine, and we voted to music that he was "a jolly good fellow."

Mathison retired to the writing-room, but we kept up our little festivities with the greatest enthusiasm.

I have never seen Proctor so jolly, even when the bill was presented for the wine and cigars, which amounted to over £12. Some of these ruffians (who had apparently come in from the street) must have drunk a bottle apiece.

## THE SAVAGE CLUB

Whilst Proctor was roaring with laughter, a waiter, entering the room, informed him that Mr. Mathison would like to speak to him for a moment in the writing-room. Proctor rose and followed the waiter.

Mathison in a few words informed Proctor that at last he had made up his mind, and was determined to put an end to his unsuccessful career that very evening. He had determined to jump from Waterloo Bridge and free himself from the struggles and worry of this wretched world. I need hardly say this announcement banished the smile from Proctor's hitherto jovial face.

Mathison, continuing, said there was only one thing that could save him from this miserable fate and that was "thirty pounds," and if Proctor would lend him that paltry amount, it would save his life. Proctor was so taken off his guard that he said he would consult his bank book, which he knew was at low-water mark, when he returned home and let him know early the next morning.

"You need n't do that," said Mathison, "you have the money with you in your pocket."

"Oh yes, so I have," answered Proctor, as if he had forgotten it, "but you see —"

Proctor was trying to find some reasonable excuse, when Mathison interrupted him by saying, "I would n't have asked you if I thought you were in need of the money, but you so repeatedly said, 'It was so unexpected. It was a windfall which *you* never expected' and it will be the means of saving *my* life."

There was no help for it, and Proctor parted

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with his thirty pounds in notes. Poor Mathison died a few months afterwards, so all that Proctor had of his £50 prize was £8.

One night at the Savage, Robert Ganthonry, the well-known entertainer and author of several plays, including "A Brace of Partridges," said he had written a play that would make my fortune. I took that statement with a grain of salt, but I expressed my eagerness to read it. He immediately produced it from his pocket and thrust it into my hands, and I made the usual promise to read the play at once and report my decision to him in a few days. I put the prospective gold-mine under my arm and "cabbed" it home. I suppose other things diverted my thoughts — they *do* when you are in management — and I forgot to read the play, in fact I could n't find it.

About a fortnight afterwards I strolled into the Club, and Ganthonry, who was dining with some friends, rose from his seat and with a cheery smile asked me what I thought of his farce.

I could n't tell him I had n't even looked at it. So I replied, "What I 've read is very good, most amusing. Good-bye," I said, hurrying away. He said, "Have you come to the scene where the person discovers you making love to the housemaid?"

This was rather awkward, and I stammered out, "No, not yet. In fact I 've only read half the first act. Good-bye!"

"I wish you 'd hurry up, Weedon," he said, "because there are several managers after it" (authors always say this). I *promised* to finish the play the following evening.

## THE SAVAGE CLUB

Three or four more days passed, and I dropped into the Club for a minute to see if there were any letters for me, and Ganthonry was in the hall. "How goes it?" he said. I replied I was feeling very fit. "No," he said, "I mean the play! Have n't you finished it yet?"

"No, not *all* of it," I said, "but it's jolly funny. Good-night!"

He held me by the hand and said, "One minute. Have you come to the part where the old Colonel falls into the bath?"

"Not yet," I said, and rushed out of the Club.

I made up my mind not to enter the Club again till I had found that play and read it.

We searched the house, the drawers of several old bureaux were turned inside out, cupboards and bookshelves dismantled, till my housekeeper suggested that perhaps I had left the play in the cab!! That, of course, was ridiculous, but nevertheless there would be no harm in my calling at Scotland Yard to inquire at the lost property office. I did so.

They informed me that "the play was left in a hansom cab a month ago," April 14th, and the name and address of the author, Robert Ganthonry, The Poplars, Richmond, being on the cover, it was returned to him on the *following morning*. And he had, to the amusement of the Club, been pulling my leg, and pretty hard too, I assure you!!

I was asked to play Sam Weller for a benefit, in the trial scene from "Pickwick," and accepted with great pleasure. Then it suddenly occurred to me, *Who* is going to play the Judge? This is a very important matter, since it is of no use

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your playing your part seriously if you have an irresponsible Judge, because it is in his power as Judge to guy the whole thing if he wishes to, and get all the laughter and applause, and if you are playing one of the subordinate parts and attempt to be funny he can tell you to sit down and you *must obey!* On hearing that Arthur Roberts was going to play the Judge, I suddenly remembered that I had an important engagement in the country on that date and unfortunately could n't appear.

I heard afterwards it was one of the luckiest escapes I ever had. Brandon Thomas played Sergeant Buzfuz, and whenever he spoke, Roberts requested him to "sit down," and said that he was "out of order," and if he detained the Court again by unnecessary piffle, the usher would remove him. He imitated the man who played Sam Winkle, evoking roars of laughter from the audience; whilst others were saying their lines, he was taking copious drinks from a quart tankard of ale which he had beside him on the bench. By this time the play was reduced to a monologue entertainment by Arthur Roberts, which the audience highly appreciated. He warned the jury to be careful of their verdict. If the defendant was guilty, it was his own fault for not getting a bit back by hedging with "Woodecote Pride." If the defendant was innocent, why did he do a double in the Lincolnshire and take a 20 to 1 chance about Flying Fox, knowing that Rothschild's filly was a "blankety snip?" In his opinion and also that of several members of the Badminton Club (taking another

## ARTHUR ROBERTS

long drink and lighting a cigar to give him time to think of more horrible gags) he said the defendant had overstepped the bounds of courtesy and violated the rules of the Jockey Club, and with much regret he must give the verdict for the plaintiff, and the defendant must henceforth be warned off the Turf and no longer permitted to have a "bit on" with Dicky Dunn or his brother pencillers. The curtain descended with roars of laughter and rounds of applause. It was a great success for Arthur Roberts, and indeed for the benefit, for they played to a packed audience. But the other members of the cast were naturally indignant at being made fools of, and whenever I am asked to play in the trial scene from "*Pickwick*," I always inquire first, "Who is going to play the Judge?"

On one occasion I spent a delightful evening at Miss Ewretta Lawrence's artistic home in St. John's Wood, where the Sister Arts were fully represented. I lolled in a white wicker chair in the conservatory, chatting to fair women and jealous men. Naturally I did n't know that the chair on which I was seated had just been painted, and white paint on cane takes a long time to become thoroughly dry. When I got home and removed my clothes, I found they were stamped with little white spots all over; the suit could n't be cleaned, but it was an old one, and I was rather pleased to put it aside for the new one I had just had built.

The picturesque Ewretta Lawrence, whom I had the pleasure of meeting again the following week, expressed great regret, although she was smiling (a way she has), and said "the chair you sat on was

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the most comfortable one in the house, and I believe Murray Carson knew that it was still wet with paint, otherwise *he* would most certainly have been sitting on it." "I wish he had," I remarked. "Never mind," said Ewretta, "forgive me, don't be cross. Come and dine next Wednesday, otherwise I shall think you are offended." I laughed and cheerily accepted her kind invitation, and on the following Wednesday was sitting at dinner in her pretty but rather small dining-room in the Wellington Road in company with, among others, Locke, the dramatist and author of "The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne"—and many other entertaining works—and H. J. Biron, the magistrate. With the usual vanity of man I was rather pleased with my new dress togs. I was feeling and hoping that I was at my best, and so I was, until one of the maids caught her foot in the fender while handing me some sauce and emptied the entire contents of the sauce-boat down my shoulders and waistcoat. I forget whether I said D—! Whenever I go to Miss Lawrence's now, knowing that fate is against me, I *hire* a dress-suit from Mike Angel for the occasion!



*Photo Alfred Ellis*  
**FRED. TERRY AND WEEDON GROSSMITH IN "THE LITTLE DODGE"**



## CHAPTER XIX.

### JACK SHEPPARD AND HIGHWAYMEN

ABOUT the year 1896 I commissioned the late Joseph Hatton to write a play for me on the life of Jack Sheppard the Housebreaker. I was perhaps influenced by many friends who declared I had a strong resemblance in face and stature to that gentleman. I suppose there must have been a likeness in a way, for Sir Melville Macnaghton, the "boss" of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, has my portrait as Sheppard hanging next to the print of the *real* Sheppard, taken from the original portrait painted of him in the condemned cell by Sir James Thornhill, a commission from King George I!

Joseph Hatton very quickly realised that I did not want the romantic milksop Sheppard on the stage—generally played by a woman! The only possible reason I can assign for this was because Sheppard should look young and should not exceed the height of five feet four or five; otherwise it is amazing that this rough blackguard should ever have been played by one of the gentle sex.

Sheppard was a desperate hooligan, who would stick at nothing, and the actor should possess the

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qualification of a light-weight pugilist with the cunning of a fox.

It is true that Mrs. Keeley made a tremendous hit in the part at the Adelphi in 1839, and so much so that the play was prohibited after a very long run, owing to its having such a bad influence on the morals of the apprentices. You may imagine our surprise, when we sent the play to the Censor with the title of "Jack Sheppard," that it was licensed. For since the Keeley days, wherever it has been played, the title has been altered to "Old London." "Jack Sheppard" was played at the Surrey and Victoria theatres by the late E. F. Saville.

The only time I ever saw the play performed, it was my misfortune to see the part of Jack Sheppard played by a very comely-looking lady of about forty-five. She was short and very plump, and seemed to experience a great deal of difficulty in climbing down from an upper window of the prison while escaping; in fact, I am sure she would never have accomplished the difficult feat but for the assistance of Blueskin (who ought n't to have been on the spot). He took her by the hand, and helped her along gracefully, as if he were conducting her to her brougham. I also remember when the savage Jonathan Wild called Sheppard a liar, the indignant Jack earned the honest approval of the gallery by replying at the top of her voice, "Jack Sheppard was a thief, but he never told a lie!"

Hatton and myself agreed that we did n't want any of that sort of gruel in our play. It must be the real thing, and the Jack Sheppard in our play,

## JACK SHEPPARD AND HIGHWAYMEN

was to be the Jack Sheppard of real life, and Sheppard must be depicted as he was, a regular type of pale-faced blackguard and thief of the time of Queen Anne. For a whole year I instructed Hatton in crime and criminals, and I never saw a man so thoroughly steeped in the knowledge of it as Joseph Hatton was, and eventually what he did n't know of Sheppard and those famous scoundrels, Jonathan Wild and the City Marshal of that time, was n't worth knowing.

It did n't take us very long in our researches to discover that the noble-minded highwayman existed only in Novels and Operas of the style of "Captain MacHeath." They were most of them desperate blackguards, of the very worst class, who rendered the outskirts of London intolerable and unsafe; people went about so much in fear of their lives that at certain points in the neighbourhood of Islington and Kennington and Knightsbridge a bellman would ring a bell every hour or two, so that a number of people going home north or south could congregate together to march along in a party. These thieves on horseback were fine riders, and if they were shot at, they could spur the horses all over the road and make the chance of hitting them most difficult. Numbers of them were decadent gentlemen who took to the road for gain, instead of going on the stage, or driving and selling motors, as they do nowadays.

I can only find a few among all these scoundrels who were at all heroic, and those perhaps were Captain Hind, Claud Du Val, and William Nevison. The last-mentioned fought for the English in Flan-

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ders under the command of the Duke of York in 1660, and proved himself a brave soldier, but finally deserted, and took desperately to the road again, unable to resist its fascination, and while he was occasionally polite to ladies whom he robbed, he shot and killed several men who tried to arrest him, and it was undoubtedly Nevison who accomplished the famous ride to York, and *not*, I am sorry to say, Dick Turpin, who has always been credited with performing this equestrian feat on the back of the mythical Black Bess. I possessed a short but wonderful account of the life of Turpin, published a year or two after he was hanged, and there is *no mention* of the ride or the horse. I'm afraid I shall earn the dislike of my youthful readers by publicly stating this fact, and overthrowing their cherished idol. The book printed all the dreadful language that Turpin uttered during his robberies. I could scarcely keep it in MY library, so I made a present of it to George R. Sims, as he has a collection of criminal literature, being a great student of criminology. Captain Hind was a staunch loyalist, and after the death of Charles I he conceived an inveterate hatred for the Puritans, and had the great pleasure of stopping Oliver Cromwell, who was riding from Huntington to London. Hind's gang attacked the coach, but Oliver's servants were too numerous for them; one of the highwaymen, Allan, was arrested and hanged, but Hind escaped by the skin of his teeth on one of Cromwell's horses, which he rode to death. Captain Hind fought for King Charles II at Warrington and Worcester, and some authori-

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ties say he was presented to the king, but even this honour did n't save him from being hanged, drawn, and quartered at the early age of twenty-seven.

After Claud Du Val was arrested, hundreds of ladies visited him in his cell, and presented him with bouquets and flowers, and made as great a fuss over him and paid him all the attention that they would nowadays bestow on the fashionable airman of the moment. Du Val was buried under the aisle of Covent Garden Chapel, and so was eventually cremated when the Chapel was burnt.

Volumes might be written on these three notorious men of the road, Nevison, Hind, and Du Val, but it is marvellous how Dick Turpin has ever gained such extraordinary publicity, unless it be through Harrison Ainsworth's "Rookwood," for I can find nothing heroic or gallant to justify this notoriety.

Until Turpin pushed himself to the front, and won the competition for brutality, he was only one of a gang—headed by Gregory, the so-called "Captain" Gregory—who pursued their nefarious business chiefly in the neighbourhood of the North of London, and were a terror to those who had to traverse the North Road, or who lived in secluded farmhouses in the neighbourhood of Canonbury, Highbury, and Hornsey. There were no railways, telegrams, or telephones to communicate their misdeeds. These men were generally masked and otherwise disguised, and there was nothing quicker than the horse with which to pursue them, and those ridden by the officers of the law were similar

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to our modern omnibus horses, so these armed riders had the run of the roads almost completely.

They did n't, as we read in novels, gallop in front of a coach, single-handed, and exclaim, "Stand and deliver!" Not at all, not a bit like it. A rope was generally drawn across the road at some extra dark place under a clump of trees, and when the coach reached the spot, the horses stumbled over it and a gang of half a dozen, some on horses and some on foot, fired their pistols, killing the driver; and Turpin, when head of the gang, would thrust a huge horse pistol against the forehead of one of the occupants of the coach — man or woman it did n't matter which — and shout (I am quoting the mildest words I can possibly find evidence of), "D——n your blood! Your money, curse you!" and if the money was not immediately handed over, a head was battered in. This was the noble Turpin, generally depicted on the stage in a blue coat, gold laced, and wearing a neatly trimmed moustache with pointed ends, instead of the hollow-cheeked — more or less clean-shaven ruffian — with long, dirty, tangled hair.

One of the methods of the Gregory gang, with Turpin in command, was to knock at the door of some secluded farmhouse on the outskirts of the North of London, and on its being opened the gang rushed in, taking the inhabitants unawares, battering the head of any old farmer who might be in the way with the butt end of a horse pistol, and dragging the women about by the hair of their heads if they had interfered, and if a kettle of boiling water should be handy at the time it was

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poured over them. Sometimes, not wishing to hurt the women too much, and wishing to treat them leniently, they knocked them down with the handle of their whips, and if they were pretty, had no hesitation in kissing them. And on one occasion Turpin won the applause of the gang, and proved himself worthy to be their captain, by placing an old woman on the fire, and holding her there till she confessed that her life's savings were hidden under the boards. This heroic act of Turpin's greatly amused three of the gang, Wheeler, Field, and Gregory, and I confess I was not displeased to learn they were arrested a year later, and after the cowards had all given evidence against each other, in the endeavour to save their wretched necks, they were hung in chains in the marshes near Paistow for birds to peck at.

You will observe that the houses in the outskirts of London, built in the early part of the eighteenth century, have small look-out holes in the doors, to enable the inmates to observe before opening the door, so as to protect themselves against these invasions. There are many doors of this sort remaining in St. John's Wood.

Turpin, after having shot his companion thief, King, outside the Red Lion Inn, in Red Lion Street, Whitechapel, whether by accident or otherwise it is difficult to decide, though I think I must give Turpin the credit of endeavouring to defend his friend from being arrested by the officers of the Law, and one of them, Bayes, assured King when he was dying that Turpin (who had fled) intended the bullet for him — Bayes — but King disbelieved

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Bayes, and with curses swore that Turpin shot him intentionally from selfish motives, desiring to dissolve the partnership — for they were working together, the Gregory gang being scattered — and take on the business single-handed. So the dying Tom King sought revenge and informed Bayes and the other officers where they could find Turpin. "You will find him," said King feebly, "at the White House Tavern at Hackney marshes, but take you heed, for he carries three brace of pistols and a carbine." The officers went to the White House in pursuit of Turpin, but the latter escaped, assisted by the landlord and servant in the house. He was too good a customer to hand over to justice, and although there would often be a sheet pasted up at these inns offering a handsome reward, they did n't want to kill the goose with the golden eggs, for these gentlemen of the road, when they had had a good haul, would give them all round at the inns a goodly share of the spoil. Turpin was eventually arrested at Brough, near Market Cave in Yorkshire, where he was swaggering as a country gentleman and bragging of his capacity for hunting and shooting, under his own name of Palmer.

The young sportsmen at Brough observed that he was well armed, for his pockets were filled with small pistols, and to prove to these gentlemen that he knew how to use them, Turpin killed a chicken on a wall at a considerable distance. And on one of the young men remonstrating with him for having killed the landlord's favourite bird, Turpin replied, "And if he does n't keep his distance, I 'll shoot him too!"

## JACK SHEPPARD AND HIGHWAYMEN

After he was lodged in jail in 1739, none of the authorities knew they had caged the famous highwayman, except one man who had visited the cell who was ready to swear it was none other than Dick Turpin. This assertion was received with roars of laughter, but the young man persisted and declared he had half a mind to wager a ten-pound note that the prisoner was Turpin. Turpin, hearing this, could n't resist the opportunity and, whispering to him, said, "Make it a whole, mind, my lad, and I 'll go halves."

After his trial he dressed himself in his best to receive the numerous ladies who called on him, and would sit with a bouquet pinned in his coat, and on the morning he was hanged he assumed a great deal of bounce and swagger and made a speech to the enormous crowd who had come to see the hanging; after speaking for over half an hour, it evidently dawned on him that perhaps it was time to "cut the cackle and come to the 'osse," so he threw himself from the ladder and expired in five minutes.

I pen these remarks on these seventeenth and eighteenth century criminals only as a brief reminder to the readers who have not studied the subject that there is very little romance to be discovered about these "gentlemen of the road."

Jack Sheppard, as I have said, was only a footpad, housebreaker, and was chiefly notorious as a prison breaker, and Joseph Hatton drew a splendid picture of him and his surroundings, with the assistance of Bruce Smith for the scenery and Percy

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Macquoid for the costumes—the first work of this kind he ever did for the stage. We played the piece on trial at the Pavilion Theatre, Mile End (then called the Drury Lane of the East), for a month in April, 1898, with a very fine production. There were sixteen scenes, and crowds of people in it, also horses and dogs, prize-fighters, etc., the chief parts being played by my wife (May Palfrey) as Winifred Wood, Miss V. St. Lawrence, Miss de Solla, the late Charles Groves as Blueskin, and Julian Cross as Jonathan Wild—two very *fine* performances. Although, thank goodness, I am pretty active even now, I was *very* active thirteen years ago, and the part of Sheppard required it. I had to be always rushing about, butting people in the waist in the struggles, climbing over roofs of houses, or jumping from chimney-stacks and through windows. It was a thorough success, and the reason it was never played in the West End was owing to the great difficulty in finding a theatre with a large stage. There were only five or six altogether at that time, and twice when we had the opportunity of acquiring the theatre, we had not sufficient capital to take it, and when we had the capital we couldn't get the theatre. At one time it was going to be financed by a clergyman and a "noble Marquis of sporting fame," at another by the late George Singer of Coventry. At last, as time went on, I realized I was not young enough any longer to play the youthful vagabond of two and twenty, so the play has been shelved, so far as I am personally concerned, though I hope to see it staged in the West End.



WEEDON GROSSMITH AS JACK SHEPPARD



## JACK SHEPPARD AND HIGHWAYMEN

Alas! I consider I gave almost two years of my life to that play, and could n't count the number of cases of champagne that were consumed at my old house at Canonbury during the very many pleasant dinners and lunches there while we were discussing "crime" in connection with "Jack Sheppard." I am sure I never entered into anything so earnestly and ambitiously as I did into that play, and I confess I was heartily disappointed that we never played it for a big run. The late John Coleman told me that in his opinion "I should never require another play," he thought it would go on interminably in the provinces.

The late Sir Henry Irving came to the Pavilion on the first night of the production and the late J. L. Toole on the last night.

The late Isaac Cohen helped to produce it at the Pavilion Theatre, of which he was manager. He was a popular man, known to everyone in the neighbourhood and very much liked, and on one occasion in some crowded place—the Savoy of the East—he suddenly discovered that his watch had been stolen, but did n't know exactly when or where it disappeared. So he told the "galleryites" at the Pavilion of his misfortune. They seemed awfully annoyed and sympathetic about it, and all, talking at once, shouted, "It was n't *us*, sir. We know nothing about it." One individual, who seemed most concerned, said, "It could n't be Smith's or Worten's gang because they was up West, looking after the toffs—it being Opera time." Another shouted, "Excuse me, Mr. Cohen, you was in the 'Free' on Saturday, was n't you? You was? Well, then, I know

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who had it. It was those 'country' boys from Bow. You shall get your watch back all right, sir, don't you fear. All right, Guv'nor."

It was a presentation watch that Mr. Cohen highly valued, and, sure enough, it was returned to him a few days later *without comment*.

I asked Mr. Cohen what sort of business he thought we should do on the Easter Monday. "It entirely depends," he replied, "on how they come."

"Naturally," I answered, "whether they come in large numbers or small."

"That's not it at all," he said. "The point with us is whether we have any luck. It's whether they come 'thick' or 'thin,'" the meaning of which I could n't grasp. He then explained that they had room for considerably over a thousand, for standing accommodation, and whether the majority who came were fat or lean made a considerable difference to the receipts. I was very gratified at the end of the performance on Easter Monday when Isaac Cohen approached me, looking very cheery, and rubbing his hands, as he exclaimed, "It's all right, my boy, they came thin." The house was crowded. It was an experience never to be forgotten. I really believe every thief in London saw that play!

## CHAPTER XX

### THE COCKNEY SPORTSMAN. SHOOTING STORIES

**H**I, hi, cute, cute, karr-hay larr-hay, bro-o-ouh! in the distance. Nearer is the voice of the human, the beater in the thick of a fern brake and leafy copse. Hi, hi, hi! Look out! Over! Ping! Ping! Hare forward! O-ver-r! Mar-r-k—Cock! Ping! Ping! sounds from your twelve bore. D—n it, missed again! A gun pushes through the bushes. Is it down? I don't think so. But you fired? Oh, yes, I fired, both barrels. What? Yes! No! Of course it's my own gun. There's nothing the matter with the Old Gun. Eley chose it for me and he knows something about a gun. Yes, yes, it comes up all right at the shoulder. No, the stock *is n't* too long. Not a bit of it. Yes, the powder's all right, E. C., I use no other. Yes—six shot—wish it had been eight or ten. It might have touched some part of the blooming bird. Never mind, the bird's happy! It was *n't* the fault of the gun *or* the powder. I fired under the beggar. I generally do, when I don't fire *over* or too much ahead!

This does *n't* read like a fashionable shoot, when at the end of a few days you are handed a card with your name printed on it, chronicling the enor-

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mous slaughter of a thousand and fifty partridges, fifteen hundred brace of pheasants, fifty hares, etc., at the MacDoogles' in the company of such famous shots as the Duke of Roteland, Earl de Black, Lord de Clifton, Lord Wallingford, the Marquis of Ripping, and so on.

My little experience has generally been that of walking up the birds in a few hundred acres in Surrey or Essex, on a delightful cool day in October, when you may fire at everything — though you have possibly done this in September — in the company of three or four jolly companions out for fun as well as sport. The man who can't shoot is generally far more amusing than the man who can, and frequently more dangerous, which considerably adds to the pleasure and *excitement* of the sport, for as the game is not armed and cannot return the fire, there is in most cases an entire absence of any element of danger — and surely all sport should have some risk. Hunting, yachting, flying, football are all fine sports, entailing a great deal of danger to life, but shooting, unless you go with the untrained Cockney sportsman, falls short considerably in excitement when compared to these other noble sports.

But the man who fires through hedges, or across you at a bird going right or left, always causes one excitement, sometimes accompanied with temporary deafness. When walking up birds and placed left gun, I have frequently had the opportunity of examining the interior of my right-hand neighbour's barrels when carried at a right angle over the left arm, much in the manner Rudolph

## THE COCKNEY SPORTSMAN

holds it when singing in the opera of "Der Freischütz." On the stage the cartridges are blank, but when you *know* there is an ounce of lead and a full complement of powder in front of a hair-trigger, it delights the fearless sportsman because the slightest pressure of the finger on the trigger would give you every possible chance of being shot, thereby increasing the danger of your day's sport, and when you are smoking your cigar in the evening you can always amuse your hearers by relating your narrow escape.

When I used to shoot with my old friend Dobree in the early eighties, there was never any lack of excitement. I have known my host hand his gun to one, barrels forward and hammers at full cock, when scrambling over a hedge. Also he had a curious habit of catching his foot in the stubble and coming a fearful cropper, sometimes both cartridges exploding as he fell. Sometimes, when the strain was becoming too intense for me, I have hung back a bit, but this plan of action did not always succeed, for Dobree would turn and face me, giving drastic orders, in his deliberate way of speaking, to "Keep-the-line"—he was always short of breath. I remember only too well on one occasion, he corrected me with some severity, as he swung round, saying, "This-is-most-dangerous-not-keeping-the-line-someone-will-be-shot," and as he was speaking he slipped and fell in a sitting position in the swedes, both barrels exploding.

Getting a little weary of the excitement, I said, "Take care, sir!"

"That's disgraceful," Dobree answered. "That

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

man - Thompson - ought - to - be - ashamed - of - himself. Yesterday I gave him distinct orders to put nails in my boots and he has omitted to have it done." And with an angelic smile on his face, said, "My dear Grossmith, I might have shot you dead. I have no firm hold with these boots on this slippery stuff."

"That's all right, sir," his nephew replied, "better luck next time," at the same moment helping his uncle to his feet. And on we proceeded again more or less — generally *less* — "keeping the line," a long walk with nothing happening, Dobree talking loudly while telling us "to keep quiet," and putting up a landrail which no one got, waiting for our host to shoot, as it rose close to his feet. Another field was worked when a stray partridge rose close to Mr. Dobree, who slowly jerked his gun in the old style (as they did in the flintlock days, when they say a sportsman took a pinch of snuff before presenting), and when the bird passed us, Dobree still aiming, the bird being about sixty yards off, the nephew swung up his gun and pulled down the bird. Never shall I forget the consternation. "Who-fired?" said our host very indignantly, "Who-fi-red?" No one answered. "Who-fired?" repeated our host. "This-is-a-most-ungentlemanly-act. You-did n't-fire, Grossmith? You-could n't-do-such-a-thing. I-knew-your-father-I've-heard-him-lecture-several-times-and-he-has-taken-Mrs-Dobree down to supper. His-son-could n't-behave like that."

"No," I replied, "I did n't shoot, sir!"

"It could n't be-number-two — he-could n't-have been-guilty — his-grandfather-was-in-the-Crimea."

## THE COCKNEY SPORTSMAN

"No, no," shouted the nephew, "*I shot, sir!* I thought you were n't going to fire at eighty yards, so I tried a bit with the left, which being well choked brought the beggar down."

I shall never forget the disgust of my dear old host, and much as it amused me then, and does now, I daresay at my present age I might have felt equally annoyed.

"*You-had-no-right-to-fire, it-was-my-bird,*" he said.

The nephew replied, "Sorry, sir, I thought it had gone too far for you."

"That's-a-most-impertinent-remark. You-don't-know-what-you-are-talking-about. I-have-killed-birds-with-my-left-at-a-hundred-and-fifty-yards — ask Major Fergusson who-stays-here — he-will-tell-you-that-I-have-killed-my-bird-when-it-has-been-scarcely-visible-and-have-accomplished-a-right-and-left-at-eighty, and a hundred yards — and have *almost* got-my-third. This gun-is-one-of-the-finest-guns-Purdy-ever-made,-he-said-so-himself. There's no-knowing-what-it-can-do . . . if-you-are-firing-straight. I excuse-your-apparent-ungentlemanly conduct-because-you-evidently-are-not-acquainted-with-the-etiquette-of-the-stubble."

One lovely day in September I was shooting at Hatfield Broad Oak in Essex with my old friend John Hyde (the Sardine King), not unknown at the Badminton Club and at Deal, in company with Richard Free, who a few years ago nearly made Harwich the chief harbour in England, only it did n't come off then, but I believe it will. The Great Eastern Hotel, just re-opened there, is the

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

finest hotel in Essex. We had had a very fair day's sport, and Free and myself were waiting on a bit of high ground while the other guns were walking up the other side of a hedge with a couple of ancient beaters in smock frocks.

"Now take care, Grossmith," said Free, "one can't be too careful — better miss a rabbit than wound a man. The rabbit is worth sixpence, but a man's legs can't be replaced with comfort, and no money can compensate for the loss of a limb."

I rather wearily replied, "Quite so," and was standing with my gun over my shoulder, listening to the quaint and weird sound of the wind whistling down the barrels. Free continued with his advice, "Now, Grossmith, these men Hyde and Jennings are coming up the hill the other side of the hedge with the beaters, so, if anything rises, for God's sake don't fire near the hedge. We don't want to kill people."

"Quite so," I replied, "it's not a battle."

"I'm only telling you," continued Free, "because one can't be too careful. I've known the best of shots lose their heads at times, and indeed—" Karra hay! Carra hai! Cara hai! Ping! Pong! Pack! A pheasant had risen and flew over the hedge as my host fired. A dead silence followed. Then Free shouted, "Is it down?" and with a chuckle said, "It's as dead as a door-nail." No reply. Then we heard the guns and keepers advance, and slight murmuring. "Have you got it?" Free repeated, "have you got it?"

"Oh yes," replied an old beater in a smock

*Photo A. H. Fry*

WEE GEE AND GEE GEE, 1897





## THE COCKNEY SPORTSMAN

frock who was wiping his face with his hand, which was besmeared with blood, "Oh yes, I got it, *through the nose!*"

Sure enough, several pellets had passed through his nose.

Free looked at me and said, "Grossmith, did you fire?"

"No!" I replied. "*You know* I did not, but I think I know who did!"

"Who fired?" shouted Hyde.

"Never mind *who* fired," replied Free with some irritability. "The man has been shot — it matters little *who* shot him! It's an accident — it was n't done on purpose!!!"

"I'm sure of that," said Hyde, "but —"

"Well then, d——n it," retorted Free, "what the devil does it matter who fired? Why make a mountain out of a molehill?" and dragging me into the discussion, said, "Neither Grossmith nor myself is here to shoot our fellow-creatures, we are here to shoot birds! And it's always customary in this part of Essex when any beater is shot, to whip up five shillings apiece from the guns!" He then took off his cap and went round to us and made a collection for the beater. And as it was a custom — I heard afterwards a pretty frequent one! — I handed out my five shillings with pleasure. And the beater told us in the evening on our inquiring how he felt that he was never better and he wished it would happen every day.

I am bound to say in my shooting experience I have had plenty of excitement. I don't shoot now.

## CHAPTER XXI

“YOUNG MR. YARDE.” “THE LADY OF OSTEND.”  
A CIDER EVENING AT THE BEEFSTEAK CLUB.  
THE RELIEF OF MAFEKING. RELIEF OF  
LADYSMITH

**I**N the early autumn of '98 I produced a play in the Provinces in conjunction with my brother “Gee-Gee,” called “Young Mr. Yarde,” by Paul Rubens and the late Harold Ellis, their first effort in dramatic work. We did good business in the Provinces and afterwards opened at the Royalty Theatre, London, in November, but very few people came, and I “put up the shutters again” after a few weeks and shortly afterwards played at the Criterion in “My Soldier Boy,” written by Alfred Maltby and financed by a Mr. Spiers, who played the chief part. It was *almost* a success, but not *quite*. Miss Ellis Jeffreys played in it, also Mr. Maltby, and Miss Jenny MacNutty. In the same year I produced “The Lady of Ostend.” The original version of this play was written by Oscar Blumenthal and Gustav Kadelburgh, the adaptation by Sir Francis Burnand. It was produced in July in intensely hot weather. We ran for a few weeks, then closed, and reopened in the autumn, when the late Scott Buist joined me, but we did n’t last long. But it made a great success in the Provinces. Mr. Lawrence Brough, who had the pluck to acquire

## "YOUNG MR. YARDE"

the rights of "The Lady of Ostend," ran it successfully for quite seven years.

About this time I had just moved into a house at Tavistock Square, from my old house at Canonbury, and a spell of bad luck set in. During my residence there of a year and a half nothing but financial ill luck attended me. The terrible Boer War was raging at its height, placing hundreds of the theatre-going public into mourning, and I don't believe I made any income from acting that year, and indeed had serious thoughts of going back to my former profession, of painting.

During the run of "The Lady of Ostend," one evening after the performance, feeling a little depressed at the bad business, I strolled into the Beefsteak Club, hoping that I should meet some jovial companions at that delightful one-room club who would cheer me up. I was not disappointed. On entering I heard loud laughter from a merry set of about a dozen "bloods," including Sir George Chetwynd (who always reminds me of the typical Corinthian Tom, the hero of Pierce Egan's book "Tom and Jerry," the famous book which took the town by storm in 1820 and was dedicated to King George IV), Waldo Storey, the Sculptor, Leslie Ward ("Spy" of *Vanity Fair*), Freddie Post, John Drew (the popular American actor), were all assembled and in the best spirits. If I felt depressed, that feeling soon vanished in such cheerful company. Sir George pushed me into a chair at the top of the table, and requested me to be "merry and wise," at the same time chanting the chorus of a famous old song of the past — sung by either Leybourne or the Lion Comique — the great Vance.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

I obeyed and joined in the chorus.

Waldo Storey ordered "Charles" (the name generally given to the head waiter there) to fill my glass. Charles replied, "Mr. Grossmith has already ordered a whiskey and soda."

"Pour it down the sink," he replied.

I said, "I don't care for champagne, thank you."

"Of course you don't," said Sir George, "and wait till you're asked."

"I have been," I replied modestly.

"Not a bit of it," said Storey. "We've *asked you* to have some cider. That's the stuff to drink this hot weather."

"I don't like cider," I said. "You are surely not drinking cider? Waldo *always* drinks champagne."

"Never in the hot weather," said Sir George. "It's poison, and whiskey is *worse*. Don't be prejudiced. It's Devonshire cider sent up by the General (Sir Henry de Bathe), and if it's good enough for Drew and Leslie, Waldo, myself, and the General, d——n it, it's good enough for you," and out of a glass jug he half filled a tumbler, which he handed me.

"And," Drew added, "if you just add a little drop of *brandy* to it, it will take off the acidity, and you won't know it from champagne."

What they told me was *cider* was the finest champagne we had in the club, Pommery and Greno, fifteen years old, and they had had it decanted in a jug.

I have heard of people shutting their eyes and not being able to detect sherry from port, so perhaps it was excusable that I was not suspicious when I

## A CIDER EVENING

was assured that the drink they had offered me was cider, and on being asked my opinion of the "cider," after taking several sips and eventually finishing the glass with a slight shudder, I said, very deliberately, "I'm bound to confess it is not *half bad*, anyway, it is not so offensive as I thought it would be."

They all laughed. My glass was refilled, and I again added a little brandy to counteract "the metallic taste! !"

"It's quite as good as champagne, isn't it?" said Sir George.

"I won't go as far as *that*," I replied, "but on a hot night and when one is thirsty, it's better than nothing at all."

"Here, here," said Leslie, helping himself and giving me some more cider, and glasses were all filled again, and another jug brought in, and Drew said, personally he never wished to taste anything better.

I said, "I'm sorry I can't agree with you, for after all, though it may be the best concoction of its kind, it's very much like a bottle of Royal Imperial champagne at four and sixpence. In fact, it is the class of brand one might possibly encounter at a cheap subscription dance at Mitcham or Clapham."

I never heard so much laughter in the Club, it was one big roar in which the waiters found it difficult to refrain from joining.

But I continued, "One must n't look a gift horse in the mouth, and I'll take a little to show there is no ill feeling."

Pommery at fifteen shillings and sixpence a bot-

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

tle at club price, being classified at four and six-penny "gooseberry!" It was a merry evening, or rather, morning.

As he left the Club, Leslie Ward caught his foot in the fender and then cannoned off the screen. Waldo said, "That's the worst of cider."

I left the Club *quietly* and with great dignity, and thought it strange when one of the waiters told me to "mind the stairs." I knew the stairs were there, they had always been there since the Club was built—why remind one? I suppose it was necessary, for shortly after I left, one of the other members had evidently mistaken fourteen steps for one! !

There was considerable amusement among the members of the Beefsteak Club because I did not play the next day at the matinée, and boards announced "Re-appearance of Mr. Weedon Grossmith *to-night.*"

But as a matter of fact, though I certainly admit I felt "cheap" the next morning, I should have played as usual, but on inquiry from my manager what sort of house we were likely to play *to*, and on hearing his reply that the exceptionally hot weather—it was about 88 degrees in the shade,—had killed the booking and we should probably only play to ten pounds, I preferred to give the understudy a chance—they get so few—which I did, but quite forgot at the time that he had never rehearsed the breaking up scene towards the end of the play with all the accessories. I may mention that in the third act of "The Lady of Ostend" a prize-fighter suspects "Wortles," the hero, of having an intrigue with his fiancée or wife, and

## "THE LADY OF OSTEND"

completely breaks up the happy home. The china alone broken on these occasions, the very cheapest damaged stuff we could get, cost us fifteen pounds a week; there were chairs that gave way in the legs, and a couch that was smashed flat, and the hero having crawled under the *table* for protection, the prize-fighter smashed it with the fender and it broke to pieces. This was all very well and perfectly safe if you knew *where* to go, and *when*. The table was a work of art, for as it gave way in the centre one was protected by two heavy supports coming out on either side, but the poor understudy was n't aware of all these complications, not having rehearsed with the properties, and had a dreadful time; my dresser said the play never went better and the "breaking up scene" was the most realistic thing he had ever seen on the stage!! I paid the understudy's doctor's fees.

It requires something very attractive to face a temperature of 90 degrees in the shade, so I "put up the shutters" the following week, though we revived the play in the autumn for a couple of months. It has, as I said, since been touring the Provinces for seven or eight consecutive years, so it's a case of "One never can tell."

We revived "The Pantomime Rehearsal" in conjunction with Martin Harvey at the Prince of Wales Theatre, January, 1903, Martin Harvey playing in "Ibb and little Christina" and another play as well, with his wife, Miss de Silva, in it.

I fear we were not very successful.

I shall never forget one memorable night. I was about to make my entrance at ten o'clock, when I

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

heard such shouting as I had never in my life heard before, people were rushing about the streets and screaming as if the town were on fire. The news had got about that Mafeking was relieved! ! ! after General Sir Baden Powell had been shut up there for a year.

I "gagged" my entrance by saying, "I'm sorry I'm late, but I've just heard the best bit of news we have had for over three hundred days!"

There was a sudden silence, then a round of applause, but the audience were not quite certain till Brandon Thomas exclaimed, "I say, Arthur, there are a lot of funny things going on in the streets!" Then the audience shouted and hoorayed, and many left, in fact we had to hurry over the performance as quickly as we could, the row in the streets made it almost impossible to act. The people seemed to have gone mad, they were blowing trumpets and ringing bells and waving flags and shouting war songs at the top of their voices, and when we left the theatre we found people too excited to ride *inside* cabs, but were standing or sitting on the top of them.

Brandon Thomas and myself were going to supper somewhere at Chelsea to meet Whistler and some other painters, and found ourselves standing more or less on the footboard of the hansom cab, blowing trumpets as we drove through the crowded streets.

The same sort of demonstration took place shortly afterwards on "Ladysmith" night, and another incident in connection with the Boer War I shall never forget was when Sir Redvers Buller returned



WEEDON GROSSMITH AND WOODCOTE PRINCE



## GENERAL SIR REDVERS BULLER

to England, the welcome he received on entering the Beefsteak Club, of which he was such a popular member, was overwhelming. (I presented him with one of the match-boxes with his head on the front which were being sold for a shilling.)

A time of very bad theatrical business was experienced during this period of the war in South Africa, and I seemed to feel the full force of the wave of bad luck. Perhaps it was that the public were too anxious and too nervous to go as much as usual to plays, and in addition had not so much money as usual to spend on amusements, but, whatever the cause, the effect was a decided slump in Farce and Comedy, and as no one ever seems to want to see *me* in serious parts, I had to grin and bear a long spell of enforced idleness, to which the term "*resting*" is so often misapplied.

When one is earning nothing, one's expenses seem to increase rather than lessen, no matter how economical one may endeavour to be. This was my experience at that time, which reminds me of a little incident which seemed then to be another blow from the hand of Fate. One morning my wife, when reading the papers, called out to me: "All the scenery stored in the Midland Railway arches was destroyed last night in a big conflagration."

"Weedon," she said, "surely all the Jack Sheppard scenery is there!" My heart gave a bound — *it was*, and I was paying the storage bill and insurances for the value of £1000, I had been doing so for some years.

"Wait a moment," I said excitedly, "we must n't let ourselves be carried away and jump at this good

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

news too quickly, let's be *sure*. Is it the old or the new building which is burnt?"

"The *old* wing was completely gutted," answered my wife, reading from the newspaper.

"Ah, what luck!" said I. I particularly requested the Midland Company to store our things in the new wing, so as to be free from damp, but they were so crowded up, and we had so much to store, that it was found impossible to comply with my request, and I had received a letter from the officials of the company, informing me of this, and that they would have to put my scenery, etc., in the *old* building! For my anxiety to keep the scenery free from damage by water—I had not thought of fire—what luck!! So with a lightened heart, and an assumption of resignation under great stress and anxiety—which I think was really an artistic touch—I hurried to the offices of the Midland Railway, and inquired if the dreadful news of the fire was true. The manager said that unfortunately it was, that the place was "*burnt out*."

"Oh!" I gasped, leaning heavily on a desk, overcome by this intelligence and quickly producing the letter I had received from the company.

"Yes," said the manager, glancing through it, "I'm afraid you are a heavy loser, sir; take a seat for a moment and I'll make further inquiries."

There was another occupant of the office, a provincial manager. He said:

"I'm afraid we are both in the same boat on this journey. My stuff is all burnt, but mine was only a little lot and old stuff too, last years Panto,

## MORE BAD LUCK

but at the same time it was useful for chopping up — and Dick Whittington is always good for the ‘fit ups.’ But yours is a different story,” he said, “you can’t replace it.”

“No, indeed,” I replied, quite truthfully and with an air of assumed careless indifference, “but I hope I’m man enough to bear any financial shock calmly and philosophically.”

At that moment the manager hurried into the office and said excitedly, that after receiving my last urgent letter about keeping the scenery dry, they had with great difficulty made room for it in the *New* wing to oblige me, so it was *untouched*.

“What!” I exclaimed, “*not* burnt?”

“No” was the answer, “the flames were never near it!”

I suppressed an exclamation beginning with D—— with difficulty — and with a hollow laugh, said, “That *is* fortunate,” the country manager seized my hand and nearly shook it off — as he congratulated me.

I went out into the station bar and had a whiskey and soda.

This is an example of what *real* bad luck is.

I never had such an unfortunate theatrical time in my life as I went through at this period, and one night at the Tatler’s Club (a little club I founded in conjunction with Duff Tayler, Harry Lawrence and Paul Rubens), I was pouring out my grievances to Fred Terry, who listened very quietly and I thought indifferently, till I almost accused him of not being sympathetic because he was always so successful and always in a fine engage-

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

ment, when he astonished me by telling me that he had done *nothing for over a year*. I could scarcely believe it, and he modestly informed me that he was going to try a "kick" of his own with a play called "Sweet Nell of Old Drury" at the Haymarket. This play was a great success and he has never looked back since, but it was a great speculation on his part and he was deservedly rewarded for his pluck and enterprise. One thinks, when one is pouring out one's grievances to another person, that the monopoly of misfortune entirely belongs to the speaker. The American drummer (commercial traveller) has a method of reminding one that this is not so, by presenting a card on which is printed "I have troubles of my own." The revival of "The Pantomime Rehearsal" had a very short run, and for many months I had no plays and no engagements, so I sold my house in Tavistock Square, took a furnished flat, and stored all my furniture.

## CHAPTER XXII

### "THE NIGHT OF THE PARTY." PHOTOGRAPHED WITH A LION

HAVING nothing to do, I took advantage of the opportunity to write a farce, "The Night of the Party," a good deal of which was taken from life, and I modelled the juvenile part of Frank Frayne on my old friend Willie Stone—the well-known globe trotter and man about town. Alderman Hagen, Flambert, the high-class butler of the "Inner Circle," Crosbie (Frayne's butler), played by myself, Lady Hampshire, and Gipsy Vandeleur were all taken from life, and I worked hard on this play, both in London and at Harwich—to my mind one of the quaintest and most delightful of the seaside places in England, and it was a bitter blow to me when the Great Eastern Hotel (now, thank goodness, reopened with great success), where I always stayed, closed its doors.

Arthur Bourchier gave me an engagement in October of 1900, to play in the late Captain Marshall's play, "The Noble Lord," at the Criterion in company with Miss Ellis Jeffreys, Annie Hughes, Mrs. Du Maurier (then Miss Beaumont), George Giddens, and Bourchier himself. It ran for five months. Having finished my play, "The Night of

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

the Party," I engaged a company, my wife playing the leading woman's part—Lady Hampshire—and we started rehearsing in an empty house in Russell Square, lent by Mr. James Coade, who was financing the play. We tried the play "on the dog," as the vulgar saying goes, at Southend and it caught on at once. We opened in London on May 1, 1901, at the Avenue Theatre, with great success, and regardless of the dreadful heat all through the summer, (my luck), we ran the play for eight months in London. "The Night of the Party" was also a great success in the Provinces and is still being played there. I took it to America and Canada myself. It was also a success in Australia, Africa, and India. I played the part of Crosbie about seven hundred times, and Sebastian Smith, who began as my understudy, must have played it nearly a thousand times!! It is *a fact* that my wife never missed one performance for nearly two years.

I wrote the play, acted the chief part, designed the scenery and painted the poster.

Arthur Eldred, whose first part it was on the professional stage, was most successful in the character of Roundle (the Apollo) a footman, and Hubert Druce, my stage manager, made such a success in the character of Flambert (the Butler)—modelled on a personal servant to his late Majesty King Edward VII—that he has been doomed to play fashionable butlers ever since.

The morning after the production my old friend the late Sir J. Henry Johnson, who always took great interest in my theatrical doings, wired me,



*Photo Hayward & Co.*  
**WEEDON GROSSMITH NURSING "LITTLE GEORGE"**



## "THE NIGHT OF THE PARTY"

"Have read the *Telegraph*, so very sorry the play is not a success," but half an hour afterwards I received another wire from him, saying, "Have read the *Morning Post*, most hearty congratulations on your great success both as author and actor." *Quot homines, tot sententiæ*, and so what gives pleasure to one critic is poison to another. This little incident will amuse my friends Edward Morton and B. W. Findon.

Whatever I have done in the way of writing plays, good, bad, or indifferent, and the majority have doubtless been indifferent, they have at least been original, or fancies of my own creation. They have not been stolen from the French or German or any other nation, and they have not been either adaptations, translations, or merely *cribs*.

I have done many foolish things in my life, but perhaps the most stupid and dangerous event happened on an occasion when I went to see my old friend J. L. Toole at Margate, where he was living, quite invalided and suffering a great deal of pain, and very depressed. Frank Arlton, his nephew, was devoting his life to looking after Toole, and anyone who could cause him to smile or attract his attention was in himself a godsend, anything to shake off the dreadful depression from which he suffered.

Sanger's Menagerie was stationed at the Hall by the sea, and I remembered having seen pictures in the illustrated papers of ladies nursing a little lion cub belonging to Sanger, and it occurred to me that I would be photographed with the lion cub to amuse Toole. So off I walked in the morning to the grounds at the back of the Hall by the sea, where

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

the lion lived with the keeper and his wife. He slept on an ordinary bedstead in the room adjoining theirs. They seemed not a little surprised when I suggested being photographed nursing "little George," but said they would get a photographer round immediately, and invited me to sit on a stool while they fetched "George," who was prowling about in the grounds. When the photographer arrived with his usual paraphernalia, I asked him whether he had taken the little chap often. "Oh yes," he answered, "I *used* to, but that's some time ago, perhaps four or five months. Ah!" he ejaculated, "'George' must be getting a big boy now."

At that moment the keeper appeared, staggering along carrying "George," who was grinning and snarling, and hanging half over his back.

I was amazed at his size, he was almost as big as a donkey, and when he was thrown on to my lap I discovered he was twice as heavy, the bones being so broad and thick it was all I could do to hold him. The weight was awful and the keys in my right hand trousers pocket were pressing into my leg! I have never felt more uncomfortable, and I suggested that the photograph should be postponed, but the keeper said, "You had better be done now, as 'George' is going into the cage in a few weeks, he's really too old to be photographed outside it." At that moment "George" saw a dog in the distance and leapt off my lap, the "kick off" sending me flying backwards.

This was a good opportunity for me to suggest that another time would be more appropriate, but neither the keeper nor the photographer would hear

## NURSING LITTLE GEORGE

of a postponement. So after "George" had leapt in the air and over the chairs and made himself generally offensive, crouching down to stalk a horse which he had suddenly espied in a field or half killing a dog, the keeper recaptured him and brought him to me once more, and with the same kind of movement, threw him on to my lap, and clasped the beast round the waist, calling him "George, dear." He struck at his keeper twice with his paws, accompanying the movement by growls and hisses. To endeavour to pacify him I stroked him gently on the head, when, to my horror, he made a grab at my hand, and as I rapidly withdrew it, I felt his horrid teeth scrape against my fingers. The keeper seemed bewildered for a moment and cuffed "George" two or three hard blows on the head, which made him more irritable. Feeling most uncomfortable, "Another time," I shouted. "Let us postpone this," and I am bound to admit I was a little frightened.

It was a very cold morning, and I had come out without an overcoat and was feeling very chilly. What I should *like* to have done would have been to push "George" off my lap and walk briskly back to the hotel. But I felt pretty positive that had I done such a thing that cub would have seized me by the leg or sprung at me. So I deemed it wiser to continue fondling him, with my right arm round the body and the left under the neck; the beast was in a bad temper, hissing and snarling and shaking his head. The photographer suddenly shouted, "All right, now I'm ready. Smile, please smile," and with difficulty I assumed my best smile,

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

a "wooden smile," as Cecil Raleigh always describes it. I was only just in time, for in another second "George" indulged in another "kick off" in pursuit of a collie dog.

"George" went into the cage very shortly after, and I have seen this handsome creature, full grown, drawn through the town by four horses, safely caged behind stout iron bars.

Corney Grain used to say he never went into Society (with a capital S) unless he was paid to do so. I *seldom* go into Society, either—not for that reason, but for a still more cogent one, I am not often asked! When I say Society, I mean the small, important circle, not the enormous collection frequently dubbed "Society" by the writers of "Fashionable Intelligence" in the halfpenny papers. Occasionally, when invited inside this charmed and charming circle, I have thoroughly enjoyed myself. Once or twice only, in the early days of my stage career, was I embarrassed by the feeling that some of my fellow guests thought I was going to "do something" to entertain them and resented it when they found that it was not the case. I recall one delightful luncheon at a mansion in Carlton House Terrace, about a dozen years ago, when my hostess came up to me later in the drawing room, and said with a fascinating smile, "Oh, Mr. Weedon Grossmith, won't you *do something* for us? *Do!* Any little thing—a song of your own, or something, or tell a funny story." I assured her earnestly that I had no "parlour tricks" whatever, and had never been guilty of such a misdemeanour as "reciting" in my life; she was dis-

## PAYING FOR YOUR STALL

tinctly disappointed, and a dozen or so of her other guests who had gathered round us moved off, murmuring, "What a sell!" or words to that effect.

Before I left the house an elderly gentleman and his wife came up and shook me warmly by the hand, and the wife said, "Mr. Weedon Grossmith, I *always* go to see you act in all your plays, I like your management *so much*, and I always feel so thoroughly *safe* in *your* theatre." Her husband hastened to explain that this remark did not refer to the pleasant and moral tone of the plays I produced, but to the fact that as his wife was terribly afraid of fire, and they had noticed that I *never* allowed my stalls to be overcrowded, they felt that *in case* of fire there would be no danger of a great crowd making an ugly rush for the exit doors. I had been having a run of very bad luck with plays for some time previous to "The Night of the Party," and had produced two if not three "moderates" in quick succession. A few months later I saw this dear old couple beaming at me from the stalls, where they had a whole row to themselves, and probably imagined I had "arranged" it so for their especial benefit. They looked very happy, much more so than I felt, as my notice was up, and in the following week I put up the shutters and said, "Next, please."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A DRURY LANE DRAMA

I HAD pencilled a few dates for an autumn tour of "The Night of the Party" for 1903, (it is always a good standing dish), when I received a letter from Arthur Collins, the energetic and enterprising manager of Drury Lane Theatre, asking me if my engagement would permit me to call upon him at the theatre the following morning.

I thought perhaps he wished to "back" a farce and wanted me to produce and play in it. He has always been rather keen on having a "bit" in a farce, because he realises that the production is not a very costly one as a rule, and the expenses are usually in proportion, so that if the farce *should* catch on (it is ten to one it does n't) it is the biggest money-maker, theatrically, I know of.

I went to the theatre the following morning, was shown into Collins' private office, and he took me into the Saloon to talk business. By the way, the Saloon is big enough to hold another theatre for comedy and farce.

We paced up and down this palatial room whilst Arthur Collins was propounding his scheme, which was an offer for me to play the chief comedy part

## A DRURY LANE DRAMA

in the forthcoming autumn drama, a very sensational play by Cecil Raleigh, called "The Flood Tide."

Now I confess that I had always yearned to play in a Drury Lane drama.

It would be something new to me, accompanied with plenty of excitement, getting far away from loafing through a four-act comedy in dress clothes all the time, or rushing and tearing in the same costume, through doors, under tables, or out of windows, or into beds in a three-act farce. So I put my cards on the table and confessed that I "should love to play in a Drury Lane drama."

Arthur Collins then assumed a very grave expression, saying that nothing would please him better also, but it was a matter of terms. I had never seen that expression on his face before.

I named the salary that I had hitherto received, and told him I would take the same from him. For a moment and *only* for a moment, his expression showed surprise. I observed a slight elevation of his eyebrows. I am positive he was prepared for me to mention a *much higher sum*, for his answer was not quite consistent with his previous gravity. He assumed perplexity and muttered, "By Jove, yes!" and then bit his lip. This was rather bad acting, and with a slight shake of the head he said, "That's a lot of money," and he had to consider his duty to his directors, and perhaps he "ought to place it before them first," etc., then quite suddenly he said, "Well, come into the office."

I knew of course the directors had left the matter

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

entirely to him. Collins produced a printed agreement and in an open-hearted, generous manner said, "Perhaps you had better sign at once, otherwise Cecil Raleigh will approach—er" (he was thinking who Cecil Raleigh *would* approach) "as a matter of fact," continued Collins, "he *has* approached, I daresay *you* know *who*, and *he* is simply dying to play the part, and, by the way, I promised to send him a telegram." Though none of these remarks impressed *me*, I signed the agreement with the greatest pleasure in the world and without any conditions.

On asking to be allowed to read the play, as is usual when a manager is arranging with an alleged "star," I was told that it was "quite impossible," and indeed the last act was not written, and the author generally completed that irksome task at Folkestone during the week-ends, while the other acts were being rehearsed. This proceeding I thought not unusual, as I had always heard that Sheridan wrote the last act of "Pizarro" on the first night of the production at Drury Lane in 1800 while the play was *proceeding*.

There was one very important matter that was not mentioned before I signed the agreement, and that was whether I should have to appear in the great sensational scene in "The Flood Tide." This "plum" is always kept in reserve—so I heard afterwards. In this sensational scene you may have to be run over by a train, thrown from a precipice—sometimes wired, not always. If a comedian has to play the part, he will probably not be wired, as his fall is sure to be amusing, or be blown up to the

## A DRURY LANE DRAMA

giddy height of the borders, and with a carefully fixed wire drawn up in a couple of seconds, and on arriving at your destination, a platform about three feet square, you are expected to give the stage hand, who is waiting to unhook you, a shilling at least for doing his duty, and it's best and wisest to be prepared to do so.

All these little events come as a happy surprise to the actor or actress who plays in a Drury Lane drama for the first time. Nothing could have been more pleasant than the rehearsals, which commenced at the convenient time of two o'clock and continued till six, with tea served to all members of the company at four o'clock. This is a much more sensible plan than the usual time selected by managers, beginning at eleven and continuing till three with no interval for lunch, as is frequently the case even at the best theatres: one cannot work without food and it is exceedingly selfish of a manager, because *his* habit is to make a big breakfast at ten and lunch at three-thirty, to expect everyone else to fall in with his eccentricities, whereas if an adjournment is made for half an hour, everyone returns fit for their work again.

'An adjournment for an hour and a half is fatal, as I have discovered, where Charles Hawtrey has been holding the managerial reins; he is a good-natured, irresponsible chap, who refuses to take anything too seriously, and will lunch during the interval at the Carlton in the leisurely style of an English squire, quite oblivious of the fleeting time; but even this is far preferable to the selfish, dogmatic, narrow-minded tyrant, who cares not

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

whether you are hungry so long as *he* or *she* is not.

The two to six plan of Arthur Collins is an admirable one. You are *not* dragged out of your bed early in the morning, and you have all that part of the day to attend to your private business and study your part and learn the words, always a very difficult accomplishment with me. I wander for hours round the outskirts of London, ride in four-wheel cabs (taxis are no good), and frequently take a "non-stop" train to, say, Peterborough. And if you are quite alone in the carriage and buy nothing to read, you have nothing to distract you. I went to East Ham one day and had to change at Stepney and wait half an hour for a train, at which I was delighted, for a more unattractive station it had never been my good fortune to wait at. The result was I learned nearly half an act. I never learn from the type-written part, but always copy it into a little book.

The rehearsals at Drury Lane were wonderfully conducted, and it requires a considerable knowledge of management and a Napoleonic power to control between three or four hundred people, and I found Collins the personification of coolness and self-control. Only on one occasion he for a minute seemed to lose control of his temper, when addressing the mechanics down below under the stage who were working the huge lifts or, to be more correct, had omitted to do so, and his language even then was not objectionable, because it was not understandable; otherwise Lady Tree, then Mrs. Beerbohm Tree, who was playing the adventuress, would

## A DRURY LANE DRAMA

not have said in a very innocent voice to Miss Margaret Halstan (the good girl of the play), "What does he mean, dear?"

I had to make my entrance in a dog cart, the near wheel catching the wing as I drove on. I then had to leap from the cart, accompanied by loud and exhilarating music composed by James Glover, which terminated with a big chord as I embraced "Polly," my sweetheart, played by Miss Claire Romaine.

I had plenty of excitement right through and in the racing scene, when it was discovered that I had "scratched" my horse (the favourite), I was welshed and carried off on their shoulders by a huge crowd of supers, some of them porters hailing from Covent Garden Market. But whatever trouble and excitement I had gone through, and I must say the welshing was conducted on very realistic principles, it was *nothing* compared to what was in store for me at the end of the third act. The parts were handed out to Norman McKinnell and C. W. Somerset, who played the two villains, for the big sensational scene, Scene IV, Act III, "The Boat-house at Blackmere Lake." I heard McKinnell growling to Somerset, "Oh! We're in for it!" I cheerily remarked, "I'm sorry for you chaps, but, thank goodness, I am not on in the 'sensation' scene." "Oh yes, you *are*," said Somerset with a fiendish grin. I thought he was joking till the stage manager handed me my part; then there was no further doubt, and I read the following description of what I was expected to do: "Wellington Clip" (that was the part I played) has to witness a terrible

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

encounter between the two men, on the small island on the great Blackmere Lake. "Clip is terrified and rushes into the boathouse, and climbs the stairs to the top of a two-storied house, but, finding he is pursued, scrambles on to the roof, where he hangs clutching on to the sloping gable, as he is being pursued by the villains, who are intent on murdering him. A terrific roar is heard. The great dam has burst, and a huge volume of water floods the stage. The boathouse is swept away, and as it is falling and breaking to pieces, Clip leaps on to a big branch of a tree which is rapidly passing in the swirl of the flood!"

After reading this description, I walked round to the Law Accident Insurance Society in the Strand, and took out an accident insurance policy for a large sum. I was half inclined to take this step after rehearsing the welshing scene at the races, but the curious incidents that were to occur at Blackmere Lake quite decided me. Scene III, Act III, was what is termed a front scene. It was very dark, and a couple of dozen men dressed as workmen, with lanterns in their hands and pickaxes, were discussing the seriousness of the continuance of wet weather. It was difficult to hear all they said, for dozens of men were knocking and hammering behind, getting ready the big sensational scene. After this, Lady Tree was heard bribing Norman McKinnell, an Italian scoundrel, to murder the lunatic millionaire, played by Charles Somerset to slow music.

When they had departed the workmen re-entered; some had struck work, fearing a great accident, and

## A DRURY LANE DRAMA

the chief of the gang, who shouted and he had to shout loudly to give the "music cue," informed his mates at the top of his voice, "Things can't go on much longer, lads. The masonry is giving already. We have had three months of continuous rain, and with another night of this cursed deluge the great dam which-has-taken-seven-years-to-build-will *be in Blackmere Lake by — the — morning! ! !*"

The stage suddenly "blackened out." We are all in total darkness, black gauzes are lowered. There are shouts from the stage manager. "Strike!! Lower your borders!" Stage hands rush in every direction, carrying something, or pushing something.

"Mind your backs!" they shout. "You jump aside!" The safest place is close to the curtain, down by the footlights. I noticed Jack Barnes was continually bumped into. As he was saying, "Where the devil," etc., another push came from the opposite side. I often thought they did it on purpose.

"Get on your blues! Down with the borders! Take care! Who's working the lifts? Then why the devil don't you do it? Come on! Look out! Get your cloth down above there. Now then, boys," etc.

"No. 3 is too low! Do you hear? *Too low.* Get your props. D——n it, mind the batten! Why the tum, tum, fum rum, don't you do what you're told?" etc. The front row of the stalls frequently complain of the loudness of the band, particularly the brass, and wonder why it is not remedied, but James Glover, the conductor, knows why!

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

"Look out for your calls!" Then a boy with an electric torch leads you through rocks, rivers, spars of iron, and cautions you against an open trap, and conducts you to your place. The band is still crashing and booming, an electric sign to the orchestra, and the music changes to the tremolo and mysterious. The gauzes rise slowly, opening on the big sensational scene. The gallery is noisy with shouts of "Down in front! Order, please! Take off your 'at,'" "Lay down!" etc.

I shall never forget that first night, when the flood commenced. Tons of rice and spangles poured from the side to indicate the bursting of the dam. Children floated by, clinging to barrels and floating trees, screaming and yelling, especially as some of them got frightened and tipping sideways fell down the trap, to be caught by the men underneath. Then the boat-house, with myself hanging outside from the roof, commenced to wobble, and then the whole structure toppled over, and a huge floating tree—with a well-concealed mattress—passed by, and Somerset and myself jumped on to it and were supposed to be saved as the curtain descended slowly.

One night the tree passed too quickly for us to jump on, and we were both drowned!

I must say it was great fun, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself, as I think everyone did.

"Behind the scenes" of a sensational drama at Drury Lane is a marvellous sight, with its hundreds of people dashing about, and it requires a remarkable man like Arthur Collins to keep such a gigantic staff in order as he does, so that the great

## A DRURY LANE DRAMA

theatre, with its huge productions, is working as smoothly as a perfectly made machine. It is not generally known that Arthur Collins is an artist who paints admirably and that he was originally intended for an architect. He is a genuine lover of Art, and has one of the most lovely gardens I have seen, a perfect background for his beautiful and popular wife, whose portrait he painted a year or two ago.

## CHAPTER XXIV

"THE DUKE OF KILLCRANKIE" AND "THE LADY OF LEEDS," BY CAPT. ROBERT MARSHALL. FRANK CURZON. "THE MAN FROM BLANKLEY'S," BY ANSTEY. COMMAND PERFORMANCE AT SANDRINGHAM. "THE VAN-DYKE," WITH SIR HERBERT TREE. "MRS. PONDERBURY'S PAST." "BILLY'S BARGAIN." "MR. PREEDY AND THE COUNTESS," BY R. C. CARTON. "THE EARLY WORM" AND "SIR ANTHONY"

WHEN lessee of the Vaudeville Theatre, I wanted a first piece, and read a hundred, and the only piece I found suitable was one called "Shades of Night," by Captain Robert Marshall. But there was no address on the play, and I liked it so much that I advertised in two papers to find the author, he being in the wilds of Africa, and getting no reply I had to forego producing it, to my great regret. This was the first play Captain Marshall had written.

After the Drury Lane drama I was again going to tour "The Night of the Party," but my old friend and manager, Arthur Chudleigh, wanted me to play in "The Duke of Killicrankie" at the Criterion Theatre. This clever play was written by Captain



*Photo Ellis & Watery*  
WEEDON GROSSMITH AS THE HON. PITT WELBY IN "THE DUKE OF KILLIECRANKIE"



## "THE DUKE OF KILLCRANKIE"

Robert Marshall, and Chudleigh had suggested it would in all probability run for some months, and then he would follow it with a play I had purchased an option on. I am ashamed to confess that we regarded "The Duke of Killicrankie" in the nature of a "stop gap." It was a most brilliant success and ran for a year, Miss Marie Illington and Miss Eva Moore playing the two ladies' parts and Graham Browne and myself the two men. In the meantime Captain Marshall was writing me a very fine part in "The Lady of Leeds," and R. C. Carton was also writing me a fine part in a play called "Mr. Hopkinson," which Frank Curzon was going to produce. Unfortunately I could n't be in two places at once, and as I had just finished a most pleasant engagement with Chudleigh in Marshall's play, I thought I could not do better than remain on in another piece by the same author. So I settled to play in "The Lady of Leeds" at Wyndham's Theatre, produced by Dion Boucicault. James Welch played in "Mr. Hopkinson," which was a success, but unfortunately "The Lady of Leeds" was a failure and ran only a month. And oh! the expense of the production, which was laid in Venice, with all the stage cut up (I believe it has never been safe and solid since) to allow the gondola to float by.

Miss Nancy Price (now Mrs. Charles Maude) had a great part and was most successful in it. I played a broken down ex-waiter passing off as a prince, and I think the audience even in farce resented my duping the rich girl and eventually marrying her. Miss Fortescue was also included in the cast, also Miss Souray, a very beautiful

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

woman, now Viscountess Torrington. Lowne and Vane Tempest were also in the cast. There always seemed some trouble somewhere, so many difficulties to get over. A bad sign! My clothes cost me at least thirty pounds, "and even that didn't make the piece a success." The play was full of clever work, smart lines, etc., but the public didn't care for it,—so that excellent sportsman, Arthur Chudleigh, who never permits theatrical worries to show on his good-natured beaming countenance, shut up the shop after a four weeks' run. During the short run I was ill for a week with the "flue," and during that time my dear sister-in-law, Rosa Grossmith, passed away after a long illness. The play I had an option on, with which we intended to follow Marshall's, I tried "on the dog" in the country. It was a "frost." Frank Curzon came down to see it and said there was n't a "bob" in it, a favourite expression of his, and he was right too, as he frequently is. My wife and I then took a holiday, and I set to work to polish up a play I had written called "The Duffer." I produced it at the Comedy Theatre in August, 1905. Never have I put out such energy, assisted by my stage manager, Hubert Druce, and Hemsley, the scene painter, for the scenery. I also had an excellent "backer" in Mr. James Straus, a sportsman, who did n't squabble over fourpence halfpenny, but left matters entirely to my discretion. The first act represented the Art schools of the Royal Academy, and being an old student there, I was permitted to take drawings of the rooms. Hemsley spent hours there with me, taking careful drawings, and repro-

## "THE DUFFER"

ducing the schools *exactly* as they were, even including such small details as the hot-air gratings. The curtain rose, in Act I, on all the students at work, male and female, (for they worked together in those days, the period of the play, 1883), drawing and painting from the semi-draped model. Most of us were painting in reality, including Miss Gertrude Kingston, Tom Heslewood, and I. Miss Marie Löhr, then a sweet little girl of fourteen or so, was also one of the students. I am positive a realistic picture of an Art school was never more faithfully produced. The late Beryl Faber (Mrs. Cosmo Hamilton), a most beautiful woman and talented actress, played the leading part.

Henry Ainley, Tom Lovell, and myself played the chief men's parts, all students. Ainley was the young erratic genius, Lovell the student, handicapped with a private income, not having much incentive to work, and myself as "The Duffer," so-called, having started for the career of an artist rather late in life, like the famous Etty. The second act was an old studio in Fitzroy Square, with the high side light, and shutters put up half-way, with a fine Adam mantelpiece, carved architraves to the doors, and the painted ceiling, another careful reproduction, not seen before on the stage, but copied many times *since*. The ceiling, fireplace, and doors were reproductions of those in my own house in Bedford Square.

I had very little credit for it, because, being a comedian, I am not supposed to know anything except the art of making people laugh. If it had been produced by a tragedian or a juvenile actor,

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they might have had half a column of gush in most of the newspapers, but the comedian is only a funny man and must know nothing *except* how to make people laugh!!

Though we started at a bad time of the year, we ran in London for three months to pretty good business. The lamented death of Sir Henry Irving, which occurred suddenly at Bradford, left some dates vacant in the Provinces. I took up his dates and played for another three months in the country with success. Had the play been written round Tommy Atkins or the Sailor Bold, things would have been better, but the great public knows little of the Art of Painting and cares less! So I finished with the play, though C. W. Somerset and Louis Calvert took it on for a few months longer in the Provinces.

Next, please. Frederick Harrison "approached me" with an offer (that is the proper expression, I believe, when offering an alleged star a fine engagement) to play in "The Man from Blankley's" at the Haymarket Theatre, which I accepted, and it ran a year. What a cast! Fanny Brough, Charles Hawtrey, Harry Kemble, Holman Clarke, Arthur Playfair, and Aubrey Fitzgerald were all in it.

The second act represented a dinner-party, the guests being seated at a round table, and I as the host had to sit with my back to the audience for half an hour. This I did n't mind, but when we played it at Sandringham for a command performance I did n't like sitting so long with my back to Royalty. I suppose I 'm the only actor who has sat for half an hour with his back to his King and Queen. Our present King and Queen were also there. I was so

## "THE MAN FROM BLANKLEY'S"

near the front seats that I could hear nearly everything they said. His late Majesty Edward VII had not seen the play before, but he kept explaining the different characters and the class they belonged to, to the ladies near him, who had seen it several times.

At the conclusion of the run another excellent sportsman, Frank Curzon, engaged me at a retaining fee to play "when required," but as he had no theatres available at the time and no plays, I was at liberty to act where I liked, *if* I liked. So I accepted a most delightful engagement with my old friend Herbert Tree (now Sir Herbert) to play in "The VanDyke," and I don't believe he ever enjoyed playing in a piece more than in "The Van-Dyke," and I am sure he was never in finer form. You couldn't play with a more unselfish actor; he wished me to make as much of my part as I possibly could, and suggested that I should write it up a bit, leaving it entirely to my discretion. The parts were very equal, one was as good as the other, and the audience seemed delighted with the little play.

After this I had to refuse an excellent offer at the Haymarket Theatre from Frederick Harrison, but I did n't think the part suited me. So later on, when Hawtrey, who was playing in "Mrs. Ponderbury's Past" at the Vaudeville Theatre, wanted a long holiday in the summer, the Gattis engaged me to take his place during his absence. That clever artist, Miss Illington, played my wife.

Then on tour again with my old "standing dish," "The Night of the Party," with a revival in London of the same play under the management of Frank Curzon at the Apollo Theatre to follow.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

During the autumn tour I tried a new play I had written—under an assumed name—called “*Among the Brigands*,” which I afterwards rewrote and renamed and took on tour under the title of “*Billy Rotterford’s Descent*,” and later on produced at the Garrick Theatre, London, under the title of “*Billy’s Bargain*.” We tried it originally for one night at Birmingham. While staying at the Midland Hotel in that city, I asked Tom Lovell to come round to the hotel for the purpose of going through the words with me, and as we had a long scene together, I suggested that we should go over the words again and again until we knew them thoroughly. I took him into the Lounge, where in a comfortable corner we had the place almost to ourselves and scarcely noticed a middle-aged man sitting a little way from us. “*Among the Brigands*,” as the play was then called, was one of the wildest sensational farces ever written, and in the first act, at a fast party given by Billy Rotterford—a very eccentric individual—a “waster” of five and thirty (played by myself), he is in despair because his father has declined to pay his debts, amounting to £10,000, having paid them twice before. Colpoys, the part allotted to Lovell, was that of a smart but shady man about town. Very mysteriously, under his breath, Colpoys is suggesting a way out of the difficulty. I shall never forget that evening as we were lolling back in the lounge, in evening dress and smoking cigars. I will quote some of the dialogue, which ran as follows. I was Billy, and Tom Lovell was Colpoys.

*Billy.* Money-lenders are no good. I’ve tired



Dover Street Studios  
WEEDON GROSSMITH AS BILLY ROTTERFORD IN "BILLY'S BARGAIN"



## "BILLY'S BARGAIN"

out the Baron (a well-known Hanley money-lender) and they've got wind that the Guv. is no longer a soft thing.

*Colpoys* (in a whisper). My friend is no money-lender — he *never* lends.

*Billy*. Perhaps he steals.

*Colpoys*. What if he does? *Billy*, your father has got to pay somehow, and must be *made* to.

*Billy*. You don't suggest that we should rob him!

We were so engrossed in our parts and keen on committing the words to memory that we did n't notice we were being closely observed by a gentleman who was horrified at the diabolical remarks Lovell was hissing out under his breath. He caught such passages, in a loud whisper, as "This man Vanderhausen is a London representative of the biggest gang of thieves in Russia, and would think no more of throwing a bomb than lighting a cigarette." "Why should we scruple at robbing your father? If it was n't for the shame of being locked up, I'd snatch his watch from him any day, and think I'd done a d—d good thing!"

"Yes, yes," I replied.

Lovell continued, with a fiendish expression on his face, "Vanderhausen's people are armed to the teeth with the best kind of automatic ten-shooter, and would never be taken alive" (suiting the action to the words as if he had a pistol in his pocket). He would make a stand. I believe at this moment the gentleman rose from his seat and went to the office and lodged a complaint that, as he was carrying valuable samples of jewellery, he did n't care

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

to remain in a hotel where a couple of well-dressed flash men were, in the most barefaced way, concocting a big robbery, and who belonged to a huge gang of thieves. He said the tall one was evidently a *most desperate* character, and any one who attempted to arrest him would be shot at sight, as he made a most blatant boast that he and his friends were armed to the teeth.

The manager of the hotel, not a little alarmed, rang the electric bell for the porter, and on its being answered, asked who was in the Lounge. And much laughter followed when the porter said, "There's no one there except Mr. Lovell and Mr. Weedon Grossmith, who are rehearsing a new play."

The manager and the commercial roared with laughter, and the former told the latter that if he wished to be further acquainted with "the gang" he had better book a stall for Wednesday night at the "Royal."

In this curious play, I had arranged to get kidnapped to get £10,000 from my father, who, having got wind of the swindle, declined to pay, and in a sensational scene the brigands hurl me over a precipice, and although I am supposed to fall a thousand feet, the fall is broken half-way down by my alighting on the backs of a huge flight of wild geese. I had a wonderful dummy made of myself, dressed exactly as I was in the part, and Tussaud modelled the head and hands from sittings I gave him. It was the finest model I have ever seen. On tour, after the first performance, the model was laid in a little room instead of being put



POSTER FOR "BILLY'S BARGAIN."  
DESIGNED BY WEEDON GROSSMITH  
*(Figure life size)*

Weedon Grossmith



## "BILLY'S BARGAIN"

back in the large basket we had had made for it, and when the cleaner, coming on the following morning at six o'clock to do the room, saw the figure lying on its back with open mouth and outstretched hands in the dim early morning light, she gave a scream and rushed out of the theatre, informing a constable that "a man had been murdered in the theatre," — "a gentleman dressed in a check suit and white gaiters."

We had a duplicate dummy which some other firm had made and it was a failure, and I had told my stage manager, Duncan Druce, to dispose of it, but it occurred to him that if anything happened to the right one we could fall back on the other. Imagine my disgust, when crossing from Dublin to Holyhead, to find this beastly half-dressed dummy, without a head, propped up against some of my private luggage. I said to my manager, Maynard, "This is a horrible sight. I told Duncan to get rid of the beastly thing a long time ago." "All right, Mr. Weedon," he answered, "we'll soon do that. Here, give us a hand!" (to Latimer, a six-foot-three actor, who played Vanderhausen, one of the brigands). So they seized it after a struggle with Duncan Druce, who tried all he could to prevent its going overboard, but a plop and a splash, and it was bobbing up and down in the water. In another second we heard, "Ting! Ting! Tang! Tang!" and a shout, "Man overboard!" and several sailors commenced to rush about. I left Maynard to explain to the captain what had really happened, while I went into the smoking saloon for a quiet nap.

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

I have never played in a piece in which so many amusing things happened. Miss Madge Titheradge, who played a wild Caucasian girl, had to practise firing large revolvers with both hands without flinching, and was continually retiring into the basement or back yard of the theatre for a quarter of an hour's practice; it was some time before she could accomplish it without turning her head away and screwing her eyes up.

No one enjoyed the fun of the piece more than that capital actor and author, conversationalist, and now political orator, Murray Carson, who played the American millionaire Rotterford; during our provincial tour he would frequently take about a dozen of the men who played the Brigands into a bar, and if they wanted to stay a little after closing time they would all talk excitedly in all sorts of languages from north of the Black Sea, sometimes suggesting a fearful fight, and Murray Carson would entreat the manager not to resort to any drastic measures, and as there was no fun in being shot or blown to pieces with a bomb, he would guarantee to get them out quietly in half an hour. Every one imagined that they were really wild people brought over from the land where brigands thrive. The costumes were all genuine and were brought from the Caucasus.

Before we opened with "Billy's Bargain" at the Garrick Theatre we finished our provincial tour at the "King's," Hammersmith; and the proprietor, Mr. Mulholland, said to Maynard, "What's going to happen this time? The last time Mr. Weedon Grossmith played one of his curious sensational

## "BILLY'S BARGAIN"

farces here, he terminated the play with a house on fire, wrecked by bands of excited socialists, and the County Council were on the job here nightly. He also had a beastly boiler working all the time to throw steam across the stage to represent the passing of a locomotive, and one night the thing nearly burst." By the way, this particular boiler, which cost me twenty-five pounds, some one stole, and I have never seen or heard of it since—not that I particularly want to. The play Mulholland alluded to was "The Cure," the one I had tried a few times in the Provinces, and not being satisfied with my own performance, I took myself out of the part and engaged Graham Browne, who played it admirably. I also engaged that wonderful artist, Mrs. John Wood, and Enid Spencer Brunton.

"Is 'Billy's Bargain' a quiet piece? Anyway, I hope so," said Mulholland.

"Well," awkwardly replied Maynard, "I can't say it's *quiet*. You must judge for yourself."

At the end of the Caucasus scene a bomb is thrown, two pounds of gunpowder, encased in cardboard, being ignited at the back of the stage in a yard. The explosion was terrific, and the people in the little hostelry opposite would rush out to ascertain where the great explosion was. Some said it was the powder mills at Erith, others the gas works at St. Pancras.

I told Maynard he had better explain to the landlord of the Inn what it was, with my apologies. He returned with an answer from the landlord that it was no annoyance to him at all, quite the reverse, because after the explosion his customers

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rushed out to inquire what and where it was, and on their return their glasses had been removed and they required others; it also provided conversation and excitement until closing time.

I am afraid it must have been a great nuisance when we were playing at the Garrick Theatre, for when the explosion occurred the cab horses bolted up the Charing Cross Road. It also interfered seriously with a quiet love scene in a play that Miss Gertrude Elliot had just produced under her management at the Duke of York's, which adjoins the Garrick. The beautiful May Fortescue played a young step-mother admirably in "Billy's Bargain," and never have I seen such an excellent and realistic stage pistol duel as that between Vanderhausen and Zampassa, played respectively by Henry Latimer and Arthur Chesney. I am sure we should have run for many months, but I had signed contracts to go to America in September with R. C. Carton's play, "Mr. Preedy and the Countess," which I produced at the Criterion Theatre in 1909, where it ran for nine months, Miss Compton playing the leading part (the Countess) in her usual natural and dignified manner. It's a very good thing for an actress to have a husband who can write her such good parts, but it is also a very good thing for a husband to have a wife who can play them so successfully as Mrs. Carton does. "Mr. Preedy and the Countess" was one of the plays that Curzon thought of producing with me while I was under his management. He had produced "The Early Worm," by Fred'k Lonsdale, at Wyndham's Theatre in September, 1908, with Alfred Bishop, A. E. Matthews,

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Fanny Brough, and Miss Beaumont in the cast. But "The Early Worm" wriggled back to earth in a couple of months to make room for "Sir Anthony," by Haddon Chambers, which was produced on November 28, 1908, but the public did n't come as they should have done, if only to see the excellent performance of Nina Boucicault and young Evelyn Beerbohm, to say nothing of the blatant pomposity of Edmund Maurice and his ostentatious wife, played by Suzanne Sheldon, who portrayed most artistically a vulgar couple living in grandeur at Balham. The play might have "picked up," but I rather fancy that Curzon was anxious to "strike while the iron was hot," and produce a military play on a subject that at the moment was very much in the public eye and worked up by the papers. So my partnership with him terminated and Gerald du Maurier produced "The Englishman's Home," written by his brother, which caught on like a fever and looked like running for two years, but it suddenly fizzled out after a six months' run. I was very proud of the excellent performance given in this piece by my nephew, Lawrence Grossmith, who has done even better work since in his very natural performance in "The Glad Eye." I am as proud of him as an actor as is his dear little wife, Coralie Blythe.

## CHAPTER XXV

### BACKERS

A “BACKER,” theatrically speaking, is a gentleman who finances the production of a play. He is practically backing the manager or the author, or both.

There are two kinds of backers — the commercial backer who hopes to get fifty or one hundred per cent for his invested capital, and the backer who is “interested” in a lady who is desirous of acting. The latter has never been of any use to me, because the lady generally wants to play the leading part, and, as a rule, being quite incompetent to fill that position, it’s twenty to one she will kill the play.

My backers have always been men who did not cry if they lost and who laughed if they won, and as I have frequently had a hundred or two in a production myself and played for a nominal salary, they knew they were in pretty safe hands, and that if things were going badly I should “put up the shutters” and cut the loss.

Sometimes a backer will put up all the required capital himself, a couple of thousand pounds perhaps, or sometimes three or four people will come into the syndicate. You then read them the play (a very trying ordeal), and if they like it you “go ahead.” It’s a mistake to ask them to dinner, it

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looks as if you were "getting at them." Whenever a manager wants to engage me for a part, and at the same time asks me to dinner or lunch, I decline the invitation. That dinner or lunch sometimes costs the guest a large sum of money by his good-naturedly accepting lower terms after a jolly dinner than he would have done otherwise. Let business *be* business and keep the dinner for another time.

About fifteen years ago requiring some money for a theatrical enterprise, I consulted a friend of mine, a solicitor, who said he knew some clients who would like to put up a thousand or fifteen hundred pounds, so I arranged a dinner at the Old House, Canonbury, for eight o'clock. I was to read the play first—in the afternoon. I had ordered a dinner worthy of a backer, to be washed down by Clicquot and followed by some very good old port.

The syndicate assembled at five, and soon settled down for the reading of the farce. No one laughed for the first quarter of an hour, except my solicitor, who had an interest in making the reading "go," but he unfortunately laughed in the wrong places, so this mirth was of no value to me. The other three gentlemen were staring about the room and looking up at the ceiling, and one of them was playing an imaginary tune with his fingers on the table, which is always very irritating to a reader.

I was plodding on, and acting all the parts, as if it were the biggest thing ever penned; they still looked about the room. I was reading *something* like the following: Enter Baggles, he catches his foot in the mat and falls against Mrs. Kerlake.

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*Mrs. Kerlake* (arranging her bonnet). "Kitty, who is this?"

*Baggles.* "Baggles, madam. My name is Baggles, upon the Grampian Hills my father feeds—I mean my aunt—"

I had an encouraging laugh from the solicitor—a little overdone perhaps—which was drowned by one of the backers saying, "Excuse my interrupting you for a moment, but *is* that an *original* marble mantelpiece, built with the house, or a modern addition?"

"The original mantelpiece," I replied, putting down the play.

"How very curious," he answered; "we have one very similar to it at Brighthorpe."

"Oh, really," I said, "very interesting. Well," I continued reading: (*Baggles*) "—father feeds his flock—I mean my aunt, I should say."

*Mrs. Kerlake.* "Well, your father does n't feed here, or his flock, either. We're dining out."

*Baggles.* "And I'm so hungry"—puts on miserable expression.

Another backer by this time had walked to the window; he exclaimed, "Good gracious! surely that is not the old Canonbury Tower?"

"Oh yes, it is," I answered, rather impatiently.

"That is most interesting," he said. "I'm jolly glad I had an opportunity of seeing that; surely it was at Canonbury Tower that Oliver Goldsmith wrote 'The Vicar of Wakefield'?"

"Yes," I said, "or, I think, to be more correct, 'The Deserted Village.' "

"We'll soon settle that point," he replied, going

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to the bookcase and asking me whether I had Haydon's dictionary of dates.

I replied I had *not*, and resumed reading the farce, and finished the first act, but I could distinctly hear him whispering to the solicitor every few minutes, "I'm sure it was 'The Vicar of Wakefield,'" which was very disconcerting for me.

I read the second act, which produced a few laughs, but one of the backers, a youthful guardsman, interrupted me by saying, "That's rather funny, but tell me how does Baggles pass off as Major Shorncliffe?"

"Why," I said, "by putting on Major Shorncliffe's uniform."

"I understand that," he said, rather irritably, "but I'm asking you, how did he *get* the uniform? That's my point."

My solicitor friend, coming to my rescue, said that could easily be managed.

"Excuse me," he said, more irritably than ever, "I'm addressing Mr. Grossmith. How does he get the uniform?"

"Well," I stammered, "it doesn't say. That's done off the stage; many things are done *off* the stage, you know."

"But excuse me, I know what I'm talking about," persisted the military backer.

"Well," I said, "perhaps he got the uniform from the Major's servant."

"That's quite out of the question," he retorted. "The man would n't be such a cad as to lend himself to such a rotten trick. No soldier servant could be such a bounder." I tried to soothe

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

him down by saying I would see the author and have it cleared up. "By George, it'll have to be cleared up, rather," he said, very pugnaciously. "It's a disgusting idea, I should like to catch my man lending my things to a bounder. What?"

During the third act one backer was dozing, and my solicitor kept nudging him, saying, "Listen to this; the best part is coming." I rattled on, to keep things going as well as I could, my voice at times almost leaving me. I had only seven or eight more pages when there was a scratch at the door, I feared the worst.

Before I could stop him the military backer had opened the door, and in rushed at full speed my beautiful big white fox terrier, who had just been washed by my housekeeper and was looking at his best. He tore round the room half a dozen times at the rate of twenty miles an hour, and then repeated the movement in the reverse direction—a little habit of his—jumped on a chair, then on the couch, and barked loudly. I tried to get him out, but the backers took a great fancy to him; they seemed to like him better than the play, and proceeded to make a great fuss of him and rolled up paper balls for him to run after. I protested, but they said, "We can hear all you're saying, Mr. Grossmith. Don't let him disturb you." "Did you get him at Cruft's Dog Show?" one asked.

"No," I said rather sharply, "a friend of mine, Percy Spooner, a Vet., got him for me, one of the best judges."

"That's funny," said the military backer. "I met Spooner last night."

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"Oh, really — well, to resume the play. Baggles apologises to the Major, who swears he'll be the best man at the wedding. At the second curtain Baggles goes to embrace Kitty, the Major gets in the way and he embraces the Major."

At that moment the gong sounded for dinner, and later on, when my servant Smith was uncorking a third bottle of Clicquot, I ventured to ask them what they thought of the play.

The first man said, "Candidly, I don't like it."

The second said, "I know very little about theatrical investments, and honestly I don't feel justified in selling out £500 worth of Canadian Pacific Stock, with the dim prospect of possibly getting a bigger dividend. I don't really."

The third backer rapidly said, "I'm of the same opinion, but I tell you what I will do. To-morrow I'm going to trot round to an old pal of mine in Gray's Inn, and I'll let you know before one o'clock whether it was 'The Vicar of Wakefield' or 'The Deserted Village' that Goldsmith wrote in the Tower over the way!"

On another occasion I was about to produce a version of "Jack Sheppard," written by the late Joseph Hatton, to which I have already referred. I had already done it on trial at the Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel, where it was very successful, but in the West it would have to be produced on a far bigger scale and required a large capital.

It was a very big production, and we wanted at least five thousand pounds. One day, quite by chance, I was introduced to a man from Australia, who apparently owned gold mines by the dozen,

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and judging by the way he was flinging that valuable metal about he had evidently dug out a good quantity. He jumped at the idea of backing a theatrical enterprise, he said he would "just love it," would five thousand be *enough?* If not, ten thousand would suit him just as well. He didn't want anyone in it besides himself, he would put up the whole of the capital required. He said he hardly knew a soul in London, this being his first visit to the old country, and it would probably be the means of his making some jolly friends.

I at once asked him to the Old House to dinner, I also asked eight or ten influential friends to meet him.

Again the best wine I possessed was got out for the occasion, but my Australian friend took nothing stronger than water. I didn't discuss business with him that evening, I wanted it to be a purely social affair, and my Gold King was a great attraction to my other guests. I overheard him talking confidentially to several of my male friends, who were sitting round him in a circle, eagerly listening to every word he uttered.

He was saying, "In Kenfortic the earth's *full* of gold, all we want is a few men with a few thousand pounds to pay for the labour, for every hundred pounds put up it's a fifty per cent dividend, *sure*, the second year, and twenty-five the first. You see I can't capitalize myself, I've got £25,000 out in the other holes; that's why I'm here, to get a few thousand and rush back. I must get back at once, for while I'm here I'm being robbed on an average of a thousand a month."

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Then I could hear my friends all talking excitedly together; they were evidently bitten. They were men who rarely gamble and have their money invested in consols, steady respectable people. He proceeded to show them a sample nugget. Then I heard him saying, "I don't care a d—— who has the shares. It's 'first come first served' with me, and Mr. Grossmith's friends shall have the first cut in. I like the little chap, I've taken a fancy to him." There was a lot more talk, and more wine for my guests, but not for the Gold King; he never touched a drop, and left us dead sober as he came, but not before he had succeeded in lumbering a large quantity of more or less worthless shares on my friends, including my old friend Willie Stone. He got all the capital he required and returned to his gold fields. I need hardly say he didn't put up a penny for "Jack Sheppard."

A well-known proprietor of a huge Bucketshop once told me that if at any time I got hold of a good farce he would like to finance it. There was no necessity for me to tell him how difficult it was to find a good farce, he knew that as well as I did. However, one day I told him I had got something from the French, characteristic of most French farces, with little or no good dialogue, but several remarkable situations.

On the following Sunday he asked my wife and myself to lunch to "read a play." We lunched at two o'clock, I thought the meal would never terminate; at four o'clock I said, "Hadn't I better start on the first act?"

"No," he answered, "we are going on the coach

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to Richmond first," and a very exciting expedition it was. He was a good whip, but a bit too daring for me. On more than one occasion the leaders, who were hunters, threatened to take the fences, and on entering Richmond Park he let them have a good gallop, and I found myself looking out for a convenient place for a jump should it be necessary. I had lunched with him ostensibly for the purpose of reading a play, not to undergo what were to me the agonies and tortures of a steeplechase. I had to endure two hours and a half of this misery, and I was not even insured against accidents then, and the only happy moment for me was on the return journey, when we turned the corner near Albert Gate and entered the quiet square where he lived.

My spirits revived when we got back into his library. "Shall I start on the first act?" I asked.

"Not yet," he said, "we're going to dine in a quarter of an hour," and, sure enough, about eight o'clock we were sitting down to another long repast—a dozen courses, washed down with more champagne. I ate so much that day that food was repugnant to me for several days afterwards. At ten o'clock, after the last glass of port, my host put himself into a comfortable armchair, having lighted an enormous cigar, and said, "Fire away." So I began to read the first act, and half-way through it I saw that he was slumbering. I asked him whether he could follow it.

"Every word," he replied, "and I don't want to hear any more. What are the second and third acts about?" I told him briefly. "No good," he said, "there's not a shilling in it, but the ideas are

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good, and I think I can bring some of it into a musical comedy which half a dozen men are writing for me, and which I am financing; but as a *farce*, no good"; and he was quite right, somebody else produced it and it was a failure and they lost heavily.

After the run of "The Night of the Party" at the old Avenue Theatre—which was knocked down by the accident at Charing Cross Railway Station and is now the newly built Playhouse—I had a few months' lease to run out and we hadn't got a tenant, but my nephew, young George Grossmith, had got a children's play which he was going to produce, and said his syndicate would take the theatre if I would "make things light" in the matter of rent, which I agreed to do, namely, that they were to rent the theatre for less than half what I was paying, but if the business was good the rent would increase in proportion.

So I had a meeting with his syndicate at the theatre. At their request I took the chair, and the four gentlemen who composed the syndicate proceeded to ask me numerous questions. The first financier asked me whether I had read the little piece. I replied I had not. "That doesn't matter," he answered; "it's a winner." I said I was delighted to hear it.

No. 2 then rose and made a short speech, in which he announced that he, as a member of the syndicate, organized for the purpose of producing and running this excellent little musical piece, was desirous that they should secure, if possible, the best theatre in London and on the best possible terms, and the question now arose whether the Avenue *was* the best

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theatre. I told them — naturally — I thought it was, I had just played there. He continued, "When I say the *best* theatre, I mean the one that holds the most money." I said it did not hold so much as Drury Lane or Covent Garden, but I thought those theatres, even if they were available, were too large for a small entertainment with a very limited capital, and they were bad to "paper."

The third gentleman said the capital was small, but if the play *was* a success the capital could be increased. I reminded them that if the play was a success they would n't want to increase the capital.

"That's true," said No. 1, as if my remark were a brilliant revelation.

"Now, Mr. Weedon Grossmith, how much money does the Avenue hold?"

"I don't know," I answered; "when I took the theatre I asked the box office keeper how much it held, and he said he didn't know because it had never been full. But, roughly speaking, you could get in £200 a performance comfortably."

The members of the syndicate then proceeded to make calculations; they were only going to do afternoon performances, so they reckoned that they could take in six performances, £1200. They regarded this rather seriously, as the Prince of Wales' Theatre, which they thought they might possibly get instead of the Avenue, held £300, therefore they would be losing £600 a week if they took the Avenue.

"That's true," I said. "Taking into consideration that your expenses are so small, rent, salaries, printing, advertising, etc., in fact, the whole amount not coming to more than £400 a week, allowed a

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fine profit. Why," I said, "suppose you took only £800 a week, that would leave a profit of £400, which is not so bad."

Then replied No. 2 with great energy, "Gentlemen, if the piece is a success, which I have myself no doubt about, why not play it in the evenings as well as the afternoons? And if the theatre were full at every performance we should be taking £2400 a week, and as our total expenses, including the evening performances, would n't exceed £500 a week, we should be dividing up £1900!"

"Just so," ejaculated No. 1 rather suddenly, "then, if we had the 'Prince of Wales,' you could put a hundred on to each performance, making it £3600 on the week."

No. 3 squashed this at once by saying the 'Prince of Wales', which was enjoying a big success with their present play, was available only for four or five matinées a week.

"In that case," said No. 1, "let's wipe the 'Prince of Wales' off the slate. Now," he continued, "we know what kind of a dividend we can pay if the play is a success, but we are bound to consider the other side. Suppose, I only say *suppose*, by some unlooked-for misfortune it should not be a success, then what sort of a dividend should we pay? Something, perhaps, in the nature of a gilt-edged security, three per cent perhaps. Anyway, I don't see how we could lose!"

"What, the capital?" said No. 2. "I should hope not; there is no chance of that, surely? What do you say, Mr. Grossmith?"

I had listened to all their cheerful views for some

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time, and was the last person to put a damper on their hopes, but from my rather large experience of theatrical speculations, and knowing how exceedingly risky they are, I felt it my duty to undeceive them, and let them have the unvarnished truth, by telling them that there was every chance of their losing their capital if the enterprise failed to attract the public.

"What, the entire lot?" said No. 1.

"Every penny," I answered, "but what I should advise you to do is, if the business is rocky, to adopt my methods, and put up the shutters at once, and save something from the wreck."

This caused general depression all round; the thought of a small dividend was bad enough, but the possibility of losing the entire capital was unthinkable.

After a long pause No. 1 said, "But how can we lose? Suppose we only play the six matinées and no evening performances, and our total expenditure does not exceed £400 a week; suppose the business *is* bad, and we play to rotten houses and the theatre is only *half* full; say the business is so bad that the theatre is two-thirds empty and we were only playing to £70 a performance, then we should make over four hundred a week, gentlemen, and although we should make no profit we certainly should n't lose."

"That's true," I said, "but you might play to considerably under £70 a performance; you might not play to half that amount and less even than that."

This sent their spirits down considerably, when just at that moment my business manager, Mr.

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Edward Michael, entered the room, and they rallied round him for consolation.

"Now, Mr. Michael, you've just come in time. Mr. Weedon Grossmith has been depressing us a bit, we want your views. We know what the house holds and all we can take, but what's the least we can take if the piece is not a 'great go'?"

"The least?" answered Michael. "If the play is a fizzle you won't play to more than £10 a performance!"

"What?" shrieked No. 1 backer, "Impossible!"

"My dear sir," said Michael, "believe me, if the thing does n't catch on you won't take £5 a performance, perhaps not *five shillings*."

They all exclaimed at the same time, "What!!!"

"Indeed," said Michael "a famous actor in this very theatre told me himself that one night they only took eleven shillings!"

The syndicate was absolutely speechless. I had another appointment and had to leave them, but I have it from Michael that this is what followed. They were in the midst of their gloom when George Junior arrived on the scene, and making an entrance in his best light-comedy manner, dressed in the pink of fashion, or rather six months ahead of it, laughing and slapping his hands together, said, "Sorry I'm late. 'Ullo, what's the matter here, anyone ill? Send for a Doc!"

The syndicate proceeded to relate the gloomy outlook Michael and myself had put before them in case of failure.

"Oh, is that all?" responded George Junior.

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"You mustn't mind what my uncle says. That's his dry humour; he was pulling your leg. As for dear old Jonah man Michael, he's a trouble-seeker, bless him. You can take it from me, in an enterprise of this sort there's no such word as failure. I don't know how to spell it."

"Ah! that's what we want to hear," the syndicate unanimously responded.

"By the way," said George Junior, "what are we drinking? Give it a name and I'll shout."

"Never on your life," said No 1. "This is mine."

"All right, let it rest at that," said George Junior, and the commissionaire was sent out for a couple of bottles of champagne, "And 'Pom' for choice!" shouted George Junior down the stairs.

They were soon drinking the effervescent straw-coloured beverage out of tumblers, and under the combined influence of George Junior and the golden mixture they were restored to their original sanguine frame of mind, and the popular Gaiety favourite terminated his hopeful address by saying, "We shall probably play to £150 or £200 a performance, and if we can't get 'em all into the Avenue, dash it, we'll take another blooming theatre and engage another company." The syndicate shook hands with each other and considered their fortunes made. Michael overheard No. 2 say to No. 3, "Why, we shall be getting money for nothing." I am sorry to say the piece was not a financial success. The run lasted three weeks!

One very cheerful backer I had was Mr. Frank Rowley, an accountant, who invited my manager, Maynard, and myself to lunch at Swanage, where

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he was staying at an hotel. I was playing that week at Bournemouth, so it was quite easy to get there. We had a pleasant lunch with Rowley and his wife, not a word of business being mentioned. I noticed my manager was getting fidgety, being eager to begin a business conversation, as we had to return to Bournemouth by an early train, and several times he produced some notes from his pockets saying, "The advance printing ought not to be a large item because we have already a—"

"Have some more of this salmon," chipped in Rowley, "it's not half bad." Maynard continued eating for a few minutes, while I was drawing Mrs. Rowley's attention to the beautiful effect of the sun on the sea, but I couldn't help hearing Maynard break out again into business. "We have already about five hundred twelve-sheet posters of David Allen's, but shall want some day-bills and —"

"Do you like that Moselle?" said our host; "well, we'll have some more."

"Thanks," said Maynard. "The dresses may run into money, but I shall endeavour to —"

"Stow business," said our host of figures. "We'll settle all that on the beach after lunch"; and when that meal was over, we strolled down some wooden steps from the hotel, running the last hundred yards down a sandy embankment. Out came Maynard's notes again, and he said, "We have fortunately got the refusal of the Garrick Theatre on sharing terms. Mr. Bourchier is a great friend of Mr. Weedon's, and he is desirous that he should come to the Garrick on very easy terms, so I should like —"

"One minute," said Rowley. "Can you jump?

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I 'll bet you sixpence I 'll clear that stream without wetting the heels of my boots." He proceeded to do so, followed by Maynard, who splashed himself all over. I walked round it.

"So," continued Maynard, "Mr. Bourchier, who is a hard nut to crack in an ordinary way, is willing to close but he must know by—"

"Can you run?" said Rowley, who reminded me of a boy released from school, he was so full of energy. "Sixpence I get to that post before you do."

"Right," said Maynard, putting his notes quickly into his pocket. "One, two, three, off," and I saw them both tearing along for their lives, their hats flying off at once. Rowley got there first, but I rather fancy Maynard was "slacking" on purpose to be on the best of terms with the financier.

"We ought to settle for the Garrick," said Rowley, — out of breath.

"Right," said Maynard. "Though there are a great many people in the cast, it will not be a very expensive production and I propose that you give me a cheque—"

"Wait," said Rowley, "I 'll bet either of you sixpence that I 'll hit that post out at sea before either you or Grossmith."

I joined in this interlude, and we all threw stones at a post a long way off for a quarter of an hour. Then looking at my watch, I found we must be making our way to the station. Rowley and Maynard jumped over posts as they went, and just before the train steamed in, Rowley said, "I wish you could have stayed longer. It 's been very jolly. How much capital do you want?" And on

## BACKERS

Maynard replying, Rowley said, "Right, I'll send you a cheque whenever you want it"—which he did.

I had written a play called "The London Girl," and had specially written the chief part for a clever young actress whom I had in view, and arranged a meeting at my house to read it to her; but she only wanted to hear the *part*, not the play, and didn't seem to understand it. Being very busy myself rehearsing, managing, and producing, I put the play aside and forgot all about it, but being asked one day if I had got anything that could be turned into a musical play by Bucalossi senior—the composer, who has written so many popular waltzes—I read him "The London Girl," and he liked the idea so much that I asked Kinsey Peile to write some lyrics, which Bucalossi set to some of the most catchy and pretty music I have ever heard. He was a man then of advanced years and was anxious to make, as he said, "a final shot" at the end of his career, and he put out an enormous amount of energy, and there was no one more interested in this enterprise than his son, Brigata Bucalossi, who was determined to find capital and get the play produced, and at length he informed us that he had succeeded. In the words of the penny novelette, "at last the wished-for day arrived," and the composer, the lyricist, and myself were asked to read, play and sing our respective gems at the house of a lady in Nevern Square, Earl's Court. I read the play, Kinsey Peile sang the lyrics and danced a little, while Bucalossi played *vigorously* to an audience of about half a dozen people. They were very enthusi-

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astic. The book and lyrics were "wonderful"—so they said—never had they heard such "fine and catchy music," they, in fact, wished for encores. This enthusiasm was new to me, for, as a rule, when backers like a thing they don't show their admiration—it would be a bad business policy to do so. Not so on this occasion, however; they raved and applauded. "What do you think of that?" I exclaimed to the composer. With tears in his eyes he said, "It's a 'cert.'" There was only one person who was not so enthusiastic, and that was a gentleman who had arrived late from Brighton. However, we didn't notice him and regarded him rather as a wet blanket. We had drinks and smokes and thanked our hostess profusely. Kinsey Peile and I jumped into a cab, and as we drove along congratulated ourselves and each other on the success we had achieved. "When shall we open?" said Peile. "I don't know," I replied. "I hope we are not over-capitalized, because that so minimises the profits." "I hope," Peile said, "we shall get the right theatre. "We can get *any* theatre," I answered. On the following day we learned that the people who were so enthusiastic were people who were inducing capital, and the dismal gentleman who came late was the only person ready to put up a hundred or two. "It was not his line of country," he said, "but his friend who was ready for a couple of thousand was not well and had gone abroad for six months, so that we mustn't count on *him*." Such is life!!

## CHAPTER XXVI

### COUNTRY VISITS. THE GARRICK CLUB. GEORGE GROSSMITH. LESLIE WARD'S EVENING DRESS

**I**N the summer of 1904 my wife and I were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Heilbut at their country home, The Lodge, Holyport — a most up-to-date "Model Country Cottage" — with a magnificent "Real Tennis" court and big swimming bath. The party included Mr. and Mrs. Percy Macquoid, Mr. and Mrs. Angeli, Dr. Orwin, W. L. Courtney, Sir Douglas Straight, and last, but by no means least, Caruso, the world-famous singer, who was visiting an English country house for the first time — and he could not possibly have chosen a better example.

Caruso in 1904 was extremely — what shall I say? — unsophisticated, he was like a child — in some ways. He was taken for a motor drive and insisted on holding the hand of the prettiest woman in the car all the time. He sang softly to himself at lunch, and then he heard his own voice on Sam Heilbut's enormous gramaphone; it did not seem altogether to please him, so later he sang to us himself — an unforgettable event, his exquisite voice making even the unmusical amongst us (if there were any) feel a lump in his throat. Caruso was obliged to return to town on the Sunday night. At that time his

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

knowledge of the English language was somewhat limited, and on the return journey he was taken in charge by Mrs. Macquoid, but she told me afterwards that he was no trouble, as he went to sleep like a tired child directly the train started. Caruso was photographed on this occasion with an admiring crowd of ladies surrounding him. Since that time he has become even more widely known! During the afternoon he did a five-minute sketch of me, and I did one of him, which latter Mrs. Heilbut, I believe, still has.

Sam Heilbut is a famous raconteur, with a truly marvellous memory. He is a living encyclopædia of all theatrical events, names and dates, and I think the only man who ever tried to cultivate truffles in England in their native soil, which he imported for the purpose.

No reminiscences of mine would be complete without more than a passing reference to my old friend and brother artist, Percy Macquoid, and his wife, known to their intimates as "Theresa and Percy," both connoisseurs in all branches of Art, both having the same cultured tastes, which, combined with long study of the subject, have enabled them to surround themselves, both at the famous Yellow House and in their "gem" of a country abode in Sussex, with beautiful furniture, tapestry, and, in fact, all those lovely and desirable things which are a perpetual delight to their many friends. My friendship with Percy Macquoid began when we were both students at the R. A., and during the last sixteen years many are the cheery and delightful days I have spent in his society, and many are the



A FIVE MINUTES' SKETCH OF WEEDON GROSSMITH BY CARUSO



## HERTFORD CASTLE

pleasant dinners I have enjoyed at the Yellow House. I think the most enjoyable and successful Christmas Days I can recall have been those spent in company with my family of two at Staplefield Grange, where a small but select party have enjoyed the perfection of hospitality, combined with that rare but delightful feeling that you are perfectly at home in your friend's house, and can do just as you like, when you like. I know no greater proof of real solid friendship than to be placed on this footing.

Amongst his minor accomplishments Percy Macquoid numbers that of being a fine judge of wine, and has a genius for mixing rum punch, to which I can testify, and so can another mutual friend, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, as we have consumed it together on several cheery New Year's night gatherings at the Yellow House. I have just been responsible for the enlarging of a famous pond at Staplefield, having enthused Percy and Theresa with my craze for pondmaking, fountains, fishing, and kindred recreations. The new pond is weighing rather heavily on my mind. I trust it will prove a successful innovation, as I have almost a proprietorial feeling with regard to the "fishing rights."

Another kind of jolly go-as-you-please visit was always at Mrs. Lowe's, who rented Hertford Castle, Hertford — now presented to the town by the Marquis of Salisbury. It was supposed to be haunted. Mrs. Lowe's great endeavour is always to make her friends happy, and where could a better place be found for croquet, tennis, and bowls than on the old Tilting Ground, surrounded with high walls six or seven feet thick, "far from the madding crowd,"

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

though in the town, and only twenty-five miles from London? Especially convenient for the actor man, who after his performance could easily catch the last train at twelve o'clock and be in the Castle at one. In the summer months it was most amusing to note the numbers of anglers of coarse fish getting out at the various stations: Ponder's End, St. Margaret's, Broxburne and the Rye House, where they were going to take up their pitches on the river Lea and wait till daylight before they commenced their sport.

I had often heard that Hertford Castle was haunted, but personally I had never been inconvenienced, and never slept better than within its thick walls, with the small Gothic windows. I was generally given a beautiful large room at the end of a long passage, but one night there came a thump at the door which woke me with a great start, which made me sit upright and stare towards the door, expecting it to fly open. It occurred to me that it might be the favourite fox terrier Jock who had thrown from his mouth a solid india rubber ball I had given him. I quickly opened the door, and though the gas jets were alight all along the corridor *nothing* was to be seen. There were no dogs and no practical jokers; in fact, I was alone in that part of the Castle. I had not returned to my room five minutes when again came a terrific thump on the door. I remained quietly in bed this time and did not again open the door, and I do not mind admitting that it was daylight before I went to sleep. I told Mrs. Lowe at breakfast about this odd occurrence, and she expressed no surprise, but said,

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"You've heard it *before*, surely? You generally sleep in that room. Did you look out on the lawn?" "No," I replied, "why should I?" "Because," she answered, "you would have seen a little figure of a man crossing it. It generally is to be seen after those thumps on the door, and seems to glide, and he carries what looks like a large apple in his hand!"

Next time I stayed at the castle Mrs. Lowe said to me quite apologetically, "I'm so sorry to turn you out of your room, but a young married couple are staying here and I knew you would n't mind a smaller one." I had no objection whatever, and I heard no more thumps on my door.

Another house where one almost *expects* to see a ghost is Bowden House, Totnes, the home of my sister-in-law, Mrs. Montagu Bush, and her husband. The original house, which was nearly four hundred years old, was a nunnery, and the crypt with the nuns' cells is there, with their gratings quite intact, a weird place underground; but the present house, built about the reign of the third George, is a most cheerful abode. I have never seen a ghost there, but then I have generally been too busy and too pleasantly occupied in other directions.

Another pleasant house I stay at is Sans Souci, the home of Baron von Eckhardstein, at Shanklin, Isle of Wight. The grounds of this pretty house, with its marble terrace, face the sea. I never knew a place so quiet and peaceful. The Baron's motto is, "Do what you like as long as you don't interfere with me." So you breakfast when you like and go to bed when you like; if you wish to stay up till three A. M. you can do so. There is no insolent

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

servant clattering about and making a noise to give you a hint to go, nor a tired host who yawns and reminds you that he generally has breakfast at eight. At the Baron's we only have to observe punctuality at one meal, and that is dinner at eight o'clock, but breakfast and lunch are "go-as-you-please." When staying with the Baron I have never been asked to get up early or pressed to stay up late, but I have observed that a nice plate of freshly cut sandwiches is generally brought in between eleven and twelve P. M. with plenty of mineral waters in case there should be a late sitting. The Baron is not an "early to bed and early to rise" man. If his friends all desert him after twelve or one o'clock, he will sit up alone and read until the blue dawn.

Lord Cork, nicknamed by his intimate pals "Sol," and the Baron are two of the worst "sitters-up" I know. W. L. Courtney, the late Freddie Warre, and dear old Joe Knight could run them pretty close occasionally, but for genuine all-round stayers I 'll back Lord Cork and the Baron against all comers.

Ralph Neville told me that, on one occasion when he was staying at Sans Souci, he retired to bed at one o'clock, leaving Lord Cork and Baron Eckhardstein in the library, smoking and chatting. There were the usual huge plate of sandwiches, the boxes of cigars, and various bottles. Later on in the morning, about six o'clock, he went to the library to get a book: the two champions had retired, but, he said, "the room looked as if a flight of locusts had passed through it." There was absolutely nothing left: no sandwiches, not the smallest piece of cake or biscuit

## SANS SOUCI

— a clean sweep had been made — and not a cigar or cigarette was left. He naturally concluded there had been a late sitting. These two gentlemen frequently pay the guinea fine at the clubs after three A. M. rather than be turned out “so early.”

One night I was at the Garrick Club in the company of the two cheery late sitters and Beerbohm Tree — I beg his pardon, Sir Herbert, — and two other members, and the time was passing happily, when Tree said to me, “Are you going to have a guinea’s worth?” “Of what?” said I. He replied, “It’s ten past three — the guinea fine.” I had just had a bad week at Deptford and to pay a guinea for staying a little longer in the Club was not in my line at all. “I’m off,” said I. “I fear we’re too late,” Tree replied, “but perhaps if we go through this door they will think we left ten minutes ago.” And we all fled with a most humiliating and undignified rush. They do not keep the late hours now that they did in the old days. I was not a member then, but was frequently the guest of Toole and Irving. I recall the many happy nights and early mornings in their delightful society and that of David James, Tom Thorne — who, I regret to hear, has fallen on bad times in his old age — the late Lord Londesborough — a fine patron of the Drama and a great favourite with its exponents — Henry Lacy, the famous old tragedian, Lord Abinger, Comyns Carr, Hermann Merivale, Charles Wyndham, Edward Terry, and E. S. Willard, whose acquisition of a fortune has deprived the stage and the public of a very fine actor.

The luncheon hour — or hours — at the Garrick

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is the time nowadays to meet Lord Burnham, beaming cheerily from the head of the long table, Sir Squire Bancroft, always a picturesque figure, H. B. Irving, just back from a highly successful Australian tour during which his wife, our popular and original Trilby, repeated her earlier successes; also brother Laurence Irving, a memorable Iago, busily discussing the pros and cons of an autumn tour. His wife is Mabel Hackney, a very clever and accomplished actress. At the side table we shall probably find Alfred Sutro and Hubert H. Davis, brother dramatists, arguing on a point of construction, Herbert Waring and Bangs, Sir Charles Wyndham, Sir Douglas Straight, W. H. Kendal, Ashby Sterry and Sir Francis Burnand. After lunch, "chaff" in the lounge served up by Seymour Hicks, with a number of good stories — some of them new ones — Arthur Chudleigh firing matches at Hicks' hat. This lounge is a warm corner, and if you can't take a joke don't stay there, for you will find Comyns Carr shooting out subtle and stinging personalities charged with humour, with the rapidity of a machine gun. Lord Craven can defend himself, even without the splendid suit of armour in which he cut such a fine figure in a recent tourney. He also has the advantage of being a Captain of the Yeomen of the Guard, but he wisely takes his ease sitting comfortably in a luxuriously padded armchair, smoking a choice cigar in a ten-inch amber mouth-piece, and looking rather like one of his own Georgian ancestors. Henry Lucy (Sir Toby) and Freddie Boyle, the Botanist, author of plays and Essayist, both members of The Garrick, were

## THE GARRICK CLUB

friends of my father! Freddie Boyle was, I believe, one of the first backers John Hollingshead ever had at the old original Gaiety Theatre.

About eighteen years ago, when we were all more or less frivolous — at least I was — I was dining at the Beefsteak Club, having an evening to spare while rehearsing a new play, when Lord Edward Cecil, now Lieutenant-General of the forces, entered (his old friends ought to be careful in addressing him in their familiar way as "Ned," though he is much annoyed if they don't), and asked me to accompany him to the Pavilion Music Hall. I readily accepted. He suggested a box, and what about taking Leslie (Leslie Ward) with us as he had been "a good boy" recently? "Thanks very much," replied Leslie, "I should be delighted, but I can't join you, because, as you observe, I am not in evening dress." "That won't matter, Leslie," said Lord Edward. "Excuse me, oh yes, it will," answered Leslie. "I could n't do it, I could n't, really. I don't so much mind going to a *theatre* in morning dress, but I should n't like to go to a music hall unless I had my dress togs on" ("glad rags" they are now called). Lord Edward thought for a minute, and with the promptitude characteristic of the soldier who has to be ready for any and every emergency, suddenly struck on a brilliant idea to overcome the difficulty. "My dear Leslie," he said, "we will not be deprived of your excellent company for the sake of an absurd convention. You *shall* be properly dressed," and calling to the steward, said, "Charles, bring some cartridge paper and pins," and, with or without Leslie's consent, we started to

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rig him up for the occasion. Leslie wore a black frock coat, dark waistcoat and trousers, and a coloured shirt. We rapidly pinned up the coat in front, getting the exact cut of a dress coat, and Cecil cut out a wonderful shirt front in paper, and with pen and ink made three fine black studs and cuffs to match, and while I cut out a high standing collar (which required a bit of doing), Cecil made a splendid white tie, not "to tie" but a "ready made" one, with the aid of gum and pins. We finished him in about five minutes, and Leslie confessed, on looking in the glass, that he had seldom seen himself to better advantage, and hoped he would last out the evening. One certainly could n't have noticed anything peculiar in him from three yards off and could never have believed he was a fake. Of course he had to be careful how he walked. We noticed he vibrated a bit, for cartridge paper hasn't the pliability of linen. We cabbed it to the Pavilion Music Hall, and Leslie never looked better than he did for the first ten minutes sitting in front of the box, even if a bit stiff; but whether it was laughing too much or moving about I can't say, but suddenly his paper tie came in half; half of it fell off, while the other half, which was pinned, remained on. Shortly afterwards the high collar tore at the back, and one cuff fell off, disclosing a blue shirt, and then the white shirt front got out of control, and he practically fell to pieces, and being ashamed to be seen in a music hall in morning dress, he had to sit at the back of the box for the remainder of the evening.

February, 1912, closed very sadly for me, for my

## GEORGE GROSSMITH

dear brother George, who had been in indifferent health for several years and a terrible sufferer from insomnia, passed peacefully away at his house at Folkestone. He had expressed great anxiety to hear the result of his eldest son's candidature for the Beefsteak Club, and directly I heard the pleasant news that "George Junior" had been elected I wired to my brother. I wrote the telegram at midnight and it was delivered at eight A. M. in the morning, but too late, as he had passed away at three A. M.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE PROVINCES

LIVERPOOL, as I have mentioned, is a joyous, fresh and brilliant city, and, by the way, now contains one of the finest hotels in the world. Manchester is tremendously go-ahead and has fine appreciative audiences. They want the best and will have it. Like Liverpool, they won't have any second-class companies "lumbered" on to them, they want the alleged "Star" and the London cast.

Sheffield, as every one knows, makes a great specialty of smoke, but I think people visiting the town don't appreciate under the circumstances how extremely picturesque it is. There is work for the painter for many months: when the sun is going down behind the hazy smoke of all colours, with dozens of chimney-stacks in the distance, all clouded in haze, and queer reflections on the river, to my mind it is worthy of the brush of a Turner. As Atkinson Grimshaw saw the beauty of the lighted shops, I see the beauties of Sheffield with its smoke and flames. I painted a little picture, from the Victoria Station Hotel looking down the river, with the puffing of the white steam from exhaust pipes and the clouds of various coloured smokes from the stacks, a little picture which is generally picked out

## THE PROVINCES

by friends who visit my house. The subject is worthy of a large canvas and a better painter.

Newcastle also furnishes good audiences and most enthusiastic ones.

Edinburgh is very critical and appreciates good work. I think Princes Street, Edinburgh, the finest and most picturesque street in Great Britain. Only one side is occupied by shops; on the other side is the grand old Castle and the old town of Canongate in the distance, backed up by Arthur's Seat and beautiful mountains—a hill, as they call it in Scotland—a mountain in Wales.

Glasgow is a great city to capture. They are naturally lovers of art of all kinds, and it is the biggest city in the United Kingdom, but not an easy audience to please.

To Bradford, also Hull, I should feel inclined to give a miss. Bradford is called, from the actor's point of view, "the comedian's grave." This I have not personally found to be the case, but it is difficult to fill the theatre unless it be with a musical comedy. They seem to want the talent of Popsy Hockitt and Dolly Cataract and a crowd of "Joy Girls" to dance to the tum-te-tum music. But what pleased me, from a painter's point of view, at Bradford was, at nearly every hotel or bar one visited,—and actors do frequently visit bars,—the number of paintings one noticed on the walls. No matter where you went, paintings were hanging everywhere, and some were very fine ones which must have cost a lot of money; not bogus Old Masters, but very good modern pictures. You will seldom see in any hotel or bar in London an oil or water-colour picture adorning the

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walls. The class of decoration you will note is generally a coloured poster advertising a brand of whiskey or soap, but at Bradford there are paintings everywhere and many of good quality.

Birmingham is a gay and cheerful town, but they very much prefer the music hall musical comedy, and "the feather in the hat and sword drama," to the quiet, cleverly written comedy that deserves more encouragement nowadays than it gets *out of London*.

On arriving at an hotel in one of the big cities I was not satisfied with the bedroom assigned to me; it was small, badly furnished, and noisy. I told the chambermaid I wanted something *very quiet*. She then took me to a large room on the ground floor. I like to be high up and have a great objection to the ground floor, but she declared it was the quietest room in the house. Never have I seen a more gloomy room; there was a high wall close to the window which prevented any daylight from entering, and but for her turning on the electric light, one would have been in total darkness. It was horrible. I told the maid I could n't sleep there; I said it was "the kind of room to commit suicide in." She evidently did n't understand all I said, because she replied, "Yes, this *was* the room he committed suicide in, but we 've had it repapered and changed the carpet since he did it!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### TOURING THE PROVINCES

**N**O doubt the great majority of actors consider an ideal engagement *is* “a good part at a good theatre in the West End of London,” and they’re right. But when the play “catches on,” as one naturally hopes it will, it is apt to become very monotonous going down to the same theatre and doing the same thing every night, whereas, if you are touring, there is a change every week, and the Sunday journey mitigates the monotonous round. When you are in management there is always the excitement of waiting to see if you will do better or worse in the next town.

The game of golf helps to make each town you visit very pleasant. I am no player myself, but I enjoy the exercise very much. Nearly every member of one’s company plays golf. My assistant stage manager and prompter, Ackerman, a lad of about nineteen, on one occasion was very eager to learn, but had no clubs, so I told him I should be very pleased to assist him in the matter, and contributed five shillings towards them, and he went to get some. He said he knew a shop where one could get half a dozen first-rate ones at a little over a shilling apiece, he had seen them in the window, and the

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next day he was radiant at having obtained them for seven shillings! It certainly was the cheapest bargain I had seen, but when he took them out to play his first game, he could do nothing with them at all, he declared he could do better with a common walking-stick, and on one of his friends trying them, was not long in discovering that they were made for a *left-handed* man. Hence their cheapness!

But to return to the Provincial Theatres. I have always been a reserved man and detest theatrical pose and show-off, but there is no doubt that if you are a "Star" touring the Provinces you ought to do what is called *play the game*, and go "everywhere" and be seen everywhere, take the chair at a smoking concert, let your stage manager tap the curtain at the end of the acts and take repeated calls, worked up by attendants in front of the house. If you have half a dozen calls, your manager sends a paragraph to the theatrical papers, *The Era* and *The Stage* (the other papers won't take them), to make the interesting announcement that at, say, Sheffield you had twenty calls after the second act and twenty-five after the third. I have never thought these paragraphs much good, for the only people who read them would be actors themselves, who would n't believe them.

I know one or two actors having great reputations in the Provinces, who after the curtain has been raised many times to *great applause*, have carefully abstained from being on the stage, only the members of the company being in view. The "great Star," who has the best part in the play — some-

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times the only good part — and has been doing noble deeds all the evening, is *not present*; why is he so modest? This won't do, so the applause redoubles, and loud shouts (pre-arranged) are heard all over the building, his name is called. There is a long pause. Then the stage is cleared of the company, with all lights out except three or four very strong limes from the side, which searching light discovers the Star *alone* on the stage. Then the cheering in front is absolutely deafening. Having, with the most modest expression, conveyed to the audience that you did n't know they wanted you (poor innocent thing), you take half a dozen calls; this is managed by not letting the curtain *quite* touch the stage when it descends, so that it goes up and down continually without stopping; then finally you wave your left hand to the stage manager in the prompt wing, indicating that you are going to make a speech, which has been loudly demanded, — by your Manager or his allies, generally your dresser, who has gone to the front of the House. The curtain remains up, and you slowly take three or four steps towards the footlights. *All* lights are up now, and the majority of the audience are standing. You are so overwhelmed at this "unexpected" reception that for a few moments you are dazed, you look right and left, scarcely knowing what to do or say (you have carefully thought out your speech in the afternoon while walking round one of the lovely parks). With your right hand you push your hair off your forehead and stammer out, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope you will *permit* me to say *dear friends?*" (cheers). "I — er

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— I — er — (this looks as if the request for a speech were unexpected and that you are quite unprepared) “I — er — have been looking forward for a long time to visiting this beautiful *City*” (loud applause), “and at length — my — er — desire has been gratified.” (Voice from gallery, “Come back again soon, sir!”) “Thank you. I” (with an upward glance at the gallery) “will deal with that invitation later. It has been my great privilege to act in all the principal cities of the world, including New York,” (cheers) “Boston and Chicago,” (loud cheers) “as well as London, and I can honestly say that never — I repeat *never*” (getting very excited) “have I played to a more appreciative or intellectual audience than it has been my good fortune to — er — to — er — exhibit my skill (if I possess any) to, to-night — an audience composed of generous *friends* if I may say so?” (Loud applause and cries of “Yes, yes.”) “I must also thank you on behalf of my colleagues, — my brother artists, who have assisted me in my work” (faint applause) “to-night. And — er — your excellent manager, who represents this palatial Temple of Art, always hard working in his endeavours to get the best productions and best attractions for you to this — to my mind — one of the best lighted and most comfortable theatres in England, I might say in the world. I refer to Mr. Jones.” (Great applause.) “He has asked me to pay a return visit in April” (applause absolutely deafening), “and I have to-night signed an agreement to do so. (No more can be heard owing to the frantic shouting.) You then step

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back, catch the eye of the stage manager (who is yawning, with hand ready to touch the bell for the descent of the curtain), smile broadly, "And I wish you, *dear friends*, Good-Night."

I loathe making a speech or listening to one, and shirk it whenever I can. I took my four-act comedy, "The Duffer," on tour; it had had a fair run in London, and at a great deal of expense I took it into the Provinces with the *original* company, including the late Beryl Faber, Gertrude Kingston, Dido Drake, Gladys Mason, and Vernon Steel, W. T. Lovell, Annie Hill, and others. It was an 'Art Play,' written entirely round the lives of Art students, and had plenty of fun and pathos.

I was very disappointed at the bad business we did at Leeds. The public preferred the opposition, a company playing a musical entertainment, generally called "musical comedy." I think it was the "Scullery Girl" or some such gem. There was not much comedy in it, and not being musical, I am not competent to express an opinion on its musical qualifications, but they "travelled" between twenty and thirty pretty girls, and I think these ladies considerably added to the drawing powers of the so-called *comedy*. The last time I was in America I met just such a company "on the road," and the coloured posters depicted forty pretty girls called "Joy Girls" and in large letters announced "that there were *none over seventeen*, and "*none were married*."

So when you are in opposition to an entertainment of this class, that appeals to gross or common-

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minded people, it is difficult to fill your house, as ten out of a dozen of the public will rush to see "The Scullery Girl," and many young men will go every night during the week's visit, and often have n't the courage to admit that they like it, but, as I have already mentioned, they will say they were "taken there." Well, to return to my play, this second-rate company with its "Joy Girls" carrying Dorothy bags and parading the town all day, from a business point of view wiped the floor with us, and I was disgusted that a city, famed for its love of music, holding a great Musical Festival, should have preferred this commonplace stuff to a sound, legitimate entertainment. However, on the last night, we had a pretty good house, and I took several calls, and there was a loud cry for a speech in a voice that sounded not unfamiliar to me. I took the usual three steps forward, catching the eye of my stage manager to hold the curtain while I said a few words. "Ladies and Gentlemen," I said, "I confess to being a little disappointed at the half-filled houses to which I have played during the early part of the week; to notice the large number of empty seats in this huge theatre is most disheartening" ("Shame," cried a voice), "and I had made up my mind not to visit this beautiful city again, professionally." (More shouts, "Don't say that, sir. We like you.") "Thank you," I replied, bowing with a sweet smile to where I thought the voice came from, "but," I continued, "even if I did n't come again, I have no doubt the woollen trade would still continue to flourish and the factories would not close down on

## TOURING THE PROVINCES

that account." (Good-natured laugh.) "Therefore I shall hope to come again at some future time." (Cheers), and a very loud voice shouted, "Come again in the autumn. We like you! You're a great actor!" (Cheers.) I recognised the voice this time. It was that of my energetic acting manager, Richard Maynard, whom I could just catch sight of standing at the back of the dress circle, imitating a megaphone with his hands on the side of his cheeks, shouting for all he was worth, and "Hallett," my dresser, was standing near him, cheering everything he said, and very much discounting the value of the applause.

By the way, my manager, Maynard, has his troubles also. He has the good fortune to have a particularly beautiful little son, the ideal of Millais' picture of "Bubbles." I have never seen a handsomer child. He was painted by Mrs. Seymour Lucas, and the boy Richard is known to many people who have not met the parents of a "Sir Joshua Reynolds Cherub." Frequently I have introduced Maynard to people who only know the son. "This is the father of Dicky," I would say, and the tactless ones would invariably reply, "Oh! No. Surely! *Really?* I expect Mrs. Maynard is a *very* beautiful woman?"

On tour, if the business is n't good, your manager will tell you "the other theatres are not playing to half your returns" and "the company that preceded yours played to only a quarter." I am only sorry for the others (if it's true) and it does n't make my business better.

The excuses are many. There was also "a flower

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

show last week" and "Amateur Theatricals at the Town Hall this week." And when things are *very* bad you are apt to suspect the people in control in the front of the house and you HOPE there is no "*leakage*."

I can quite understand the business being bad when you are "up against" a prize fight at the Rotunda Hall, a musical "Joy Girl" piece or Wrestling Bears or a dancing Alligator at the Music Hall. A great attraction now are Trained Roosters, who ride bicycles and walk the tight rope. Nothing can stand against these attractions, but I remember one occasion, when there was *nothing* against us but Shakespeare and Old Comedy, nothing to *fear*, and yet the business was not what we had hoped for. My manager, always ready with a reason, came to my dressing-room, threw down an evening paper, and said, "*This* accounts for everything, there's a big drop all round, and no wonder!" at the same time showing me the heading of a police report that a well-known manager had been arrested for manipulating accounts. "What has this to do with it?" I asked. His reply was, "No one will come to the theatre. They wouldn't like to come, in case it's the same theatre where the frauds occurred!!"

On tour, the company generally go into theatrical "digs" or second-rate hotels, where they get plain but excellent food at half the cost and much better in quality than at most of the so-called first-class hotels — where the "Star" *has* to stay, which generally has "slam doors" *ergo*, no sleep after six in the morning.

## TOURING THE PROVINCES

### OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE

Strange to say, it was not until 1910 that I visited either of our famous University towns (or cities) professionally.

I had frequently been told how much I should like playing there, and what splendid audiences I should find, and that if they happened "to take to me" all would be well, but I was scarcely prepared for the whole-hearted enthusiasm of the undergraduates of both Oxford and Cambridge. They seemed to like me almost as much as I liked them, and my whole day was spent in the company of these delightful boys, who treated me as their equal and made me feel about twenty years old for the time being. At Cambridge they are a trifle less sedate than they are at Oxford, perhaps I should rather say they are a trifle more exuberant.

I am looking forward with the keenest and pleasantest anticipation to paying another visit to Oxford and Cambridge. Unfortunately, "Baby Mine," with which I am touring this autumn, is not considered a wise play to produce in either city, for reasons best known to the genial managers of the respective theatres. Mr. Redfern, J. P., at the New Theatre, Cambridge, and Mr. Dorrill at Oxford, know their audiences too well to run any risks.

## CHAPTER XXIX

VOYAGE TO MONTREAL. HOSPITALITY IN CANADA.  
NEW YORK. JOHN DREW. "BABY MINE"

I DON'T think I ever had a more pleasant passage across the Atlantic than in the autumn of 1910 on board the "Tunisian" bound for Montreal, in spite of the fact that we encountered a terrific thunderstorm on the St. Lawrence River and ran aground; the sky at one time turned a dark green—it was a wonderful sight! I wish I could have had a shot at it with my paints. I had a most delightful time in Montreal and Toronto, and even better at Ottawa. I wanted a fortnight to be able to avail myself of all the many kind invitations I received, and a lunch at the Country Club on a brilliantly fine, sunny, yet cool autumn day, in the company of some of the most charming and the prettiest women I have ever met, will always be one of the happy landmarks in my memory.

Sir Joseph Lawrence, cheery and good-natured, and Sir Bryan Leighton seemed everywhere. Leighton would suddenly discover that he was giving three supper parties on one night, and had continually to jump up from the table to bolt off somewhere else, where he was expected at a club

## NEW YORK

or a restaurant, but it somehow seemed quite natural to him.

Everything went well in Canada, but on arriving in the States, at Washington, and after playing Carton's play, "Mr. Preedy and the Countess," it did n't take me long to discover that they did n't care for it, and I don't think that they had ever heard of *me* (it was nine years since I last visited America) with the exception of a few people who had visited Europe, including President Taft, who honoured me by his presence on the first night and was indeed a splendid audience in himself. I met at Washington the famous old actor, Denman Thompson, who has played in a curious play called "The Old Homestead" for over thirty years. There are four acts in it. He played in the first and last acts, and had a double to represent him in the second and third acts, because there was too much knock-about business for a man close on eighty years of age to indulge in. I saw Raymond Hitchcock, the Fred Leslie of America, who struck me as a man with marked personality, and is a great attraction on the other side.

We played for three weeks in New York, but the piece did not draw there. We might have done better had we played at Maxine Elliot's Theatre, as originally arranged, but at the last moment we were bowled out by an English-American author, who was desirous of placing his own play at the theatre we had settled on. I had an exceedingly pleasant time in New York, as I did in Washington, and had the good fortune to see a farce called "Baby Mine," to my mind one of the funniest

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

plays produced for many years (by Miss Margaret Mayo) and I was determined not to leave New York until I could get a firm hold of that "Baby"—not that I doubted that the poor thing would be well cared for by those cheerful London baby farmers, William Greet and Englebach, who had the English rights, though I thought that Greet might neglect the poor child, as he is away so much in the country on those long week ends that he indulges in; it might also suffer from cold feet at times and also from the smoke of the numerous cigars Englebach puffs in the course of the day at his office at Lyric Chambers. By the way, his cigars are kept in a drawer of his roll-top desk, which are fastened together, when the desk is opened, by a walking stick passed through a hole in them. This is worth knowing if you have to wait when he is out.

I produced "Baby Mine" in London in the spring of 1911, with a carefully chosen cast, including Iris Hoey, a brilliant little actress. The play ran at the Criterion and Vaudeville theatres for close on a year, and we are playing it now in the Provinces and seem likely to do so for some time to come.

While in New York I had some very cheery days and evenings. One of my hostesses was the graceful Amelia Bingham and her good-natured, hospitable husband. It is so easy to praise the husband when the wife is very attractive. I was also glad to meet William Abingdon, the champion of villainy on the stage in the good old Adelphi dramas. How I have heard him hissed when coming before the curtain to take his call! With shouts

## NEW YORK

from the pit and gallery, "Oh, you blackguard! I wish you was here! I'd give you something," etc., also Mrs. Edwin Low, a most charming hostess and clever woman. During my stay in New York I showed her the town, and took her to the top of nearly all the skyscrapers.

I had scarcely been in New York an hour, when its chief light comedian, the popular John Drew, asked me to lunch, supper, and breakfast. I lunched with Mr. and Mrs. Drew on the following day, and as he had not been to London for a couple of years he was very anxious to hear of numerous friends of his at the Beefsteak Club, of which he is a member. "How is Colonel So-and-so?" he would ask. "Alas!" I had to reply, "he died nearly a year ago." "That's bad; and how's dear old Johnnie?" "Ah, he's gone also," I answered. "And how's that lively peer, Lord —?" "Oh! he passed away three months ago." At last Drew paused, and with a very serious face said, "Say, Weedon, is n't there *any* member of the Club only seriously ill?"

## CHAPTER XXX

### LOOKING BACK. THE OLD DAYS AND WAYS

MY old friend Allan Aynesworth has just made his début as an actor-manager, and reading of his success recalls many past incidents in which we were associated in the days when I was living at the Old House, Canonbury; we used to have great times there and much fun, although I am afraid my bachelor festivals must have occasionally caused some slight excitement in that quiet neighbourhood. While we were both playing at the Court Theatre, Aynesworth was my guest at Canonbury for a few days, and after the performance we drove back together in a hansom cab — it was long before taxis were invented — and it was uphill all the way. When we arrived at the Old House, the cabman disputed the fare (as usual), although he was paid twice as much as he could legally demand. Aynesworth was in no mood for bandying words with a cabman, he wanted to get to his supper. The cabman said it was two miles beyond the radius (Canonbury is one mile *inside* it) and he *would* have another shilling! “How are you going to get it?” said Aynesworth, excitedly. “Do you know who you’re talking to, and do you know



NO. 1 BEDFORD SQUARE



## ALLAN AYNESWORTH AT CANONBURY

who lives here?" "No, I don't," answered the cabbie, "and I'm not sure that I want to; you both seem to me a bit eccentric." We had been shouting and laughing noisily all the way up, and Aynesworth had continually tapped the horse with his cane to induce him to go faster. At last Aynesworth could stand no more. "Are you going?" he shouted. "No," said the cabbie, whereupon Aynesworth seized the biggest eighteenth-century horse pistol off the oak chest just inside the hall door and placed it at the driver's head. He was so alarmed that he ducked his head, slashed the horse, and went off like a "Derby winner." I had a good deal of trouble with cabmen in those days, although I always overpaid them.

One night I returned in a hansom about two o'clock from a dance in Portman Square, a half-crown fare, but taking into consideration the hill, the time in the morning, and the weather, for it was pouring with rain, I gave the cabman five shillings. He took the money and said most politely, "I beg your pardon, sir, but you've dropped something." "Have I?" I said, "I did n't notice," and commenced to search in the mud, the pouring rain absolutely drenching me, my silk socks and my dress pumps being immediately wet through. "I think you're mistaken, cabbie, I can't see anything." I kept on striking matches, which the rain put out. "Anyway, I shall give it up, I'm soaked through." The cabbie said, "You must have dropped a shilling, sir, for you only gave me five." I wish his fare on this occasion had been my neighbour, the late Reggie Wakefield, a jovial gentleman and an

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

ex-amateur champion of the heavy-weights. I asked him once if he had ever had trouble with cabmen. "Never," he replied. "No," I said, "I suppose you overpay them more than I do." "Never, you bet," he answered; "if the distance is three miles, as it is, from Charing Cross, I give them one and sixpence." "Don't they swear?" I asked. "Never! Wait a minute, though, I remember once a man *was* rude to me." "What did you say to him?" I asked. "Nothing at all," said Wakefield, "I reached up and pulled him off his seat and held him against the wall till he apologised!!"

## SPIRITUALISM AND SPOOKS

'At the suggestion of many friends who heard the Old House was haunted, and thought it would be an excellent place for a spiritualistic séance and materialising of spirits, if possible, I agreed to give a dinner and to engage a professional medium and have a séance afterwards. Years before I had attended many of these gatherings at Mrs. Kemmis Betty's, Mrs. Ross Church's ("Annie Thomas"), Mrs. Pender-Cudlip's, and also at the Countess of Caithness', who was a great believer in spirits and spooks, and at many others. And although on several occasions I admit I was a bit alarmed, I never *saw* any spirits, though others present were nearly fainting with fright when Kate! Atmar! and Grimaldi! floated past, and Eglington, who was a famous medium at that time, and was in great request at these gatherings, begged the people holding his hands at the table to "let go," as he was "going up." We were all in total darkness, and the hostess



PART OF THE HALL AT NO. 1 BEDFORD SQUARE



## SPIRITUALISM AT CANONBURY

begged those on either side of him "not to detain him," and off he went. "He's floating round near the ceiling," someone said. "I hope he won't break the china," murmured our hostess. (In those days it was fashionable at certain houses to wire and hang up on the walls, plates, dishes, etc.) There was no fear of that. Egglington was n't floating; he was hurrying round the room, shaking the curtains so that you heard the rings at the top making a jangling noise. By this time a couple of ladies had fainted, and when the lights were relighted (there was no electric light in those days to suddenly trap a medium) Egglington was seated in his chair quite exhausted, apparently recovering from a faint, and asking "where he was?"

I had quite determined that "our meeting" at Canonbury should be a success, and although I had engaged a professional medium, *in case* she failed, where she left off, *we* must begin, and I laid my plans accordingly. Fortunately, in the Old House there was a secret hiding-place, a small room only large enough to hold one person; it started at the back of the dining-room mantelpiece, the only entrance to it was from the coal cellar. My friend Tom Heslewood had explored this place several times, and when inside, by hitting the walls with a hammer or a brick, it sounded to those in the dining-room like a weird, mysterious rapping, a long way off. Heslewood had also provided himself with a long greyish-white costume, for the purpose of "materialising" should the medium fail to raise spirits. I could n't have my guests disappointed!

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

It was indeed a very pleasant party. There were about sixteen or eighteen of us, including the beautiful Edith Chester and her friend Agnes Miller, and half a dozen other members of the fair sex, Lord Kinnoull — who was then Lord Hay of Kinfauns — Willie Elliot, and several other disbelievers. We started the séance about ten o'clock, but nothing occurred. The medium said the house was beautifully suited for a séance, and she had seen several ghosts directly she arrived, in fact, the house was full of them! Things seemed hopeful for us — all she required was sympathy! There was a little too much frivolity on the part of some of the guests, especially so in the case of Lord Hay, but I assured her that it was his natural manner, his high spirits, and that he was always given to hilarity, but was as ardent a spiritualist as myself, and that was saying a lot. Time went on and nothing happened, though Lord Hay said he fancied he "saw things," and Elliot heard taps; several *believers* got excited. "Is that you, Kate, tapping?" said someone. The medium replied, "No, I don't think Kate is here, it must be Mispah. He's a bad spirit and does us no good." Presently Heslewood got up from the table; he said he felt the heat and would walk round the garden. No one seemed to notice his going out of the French window that opened on to the garden. We went on with our work. My old servant, Smith, entered the room to bring us some fresh glasses, but I requested him to leave at once, and taking the key out of the door from the outside, I locked it from the inside — or pretended to do so — so as to have no more inter-

## SPIRITUALISM AT CANONBURY

ruptions. I gave the key to Willie Elliot to show there was no deception. After ten minutes' more waiting the medium said, "The room is full of spirits," and she anticipated we were going to do good work. At that moment there was a sound like distant knocking. I recognised that it was Heslewood in the secret hiding-place doing his part of the business with a brick. It sounded most uncanny! Even Lord Hay, the sceptic, was a little surprised for a minute, but perhaps not much longer. The gas was turned so low that one could see only about a foot ahead. Three or four ladies became alarmed, but I begged them to keep their seats. The medium declared "Atmar, a spirit," had passed behind her and gone up the chimney. The knocks continued, growing louder and louder, followed by a groan, which sounded hundreds of feet away. Willie Elliot said he felt a bit faint, Might he have a little brandy? He felt for a bottle, but I noticed it was champagne. I said we had better give up, as several people, *including myself*, were feeling a trifle nervous. But there was a general wish among the majority to continue. The table moved and jogged a bit, especially on the side nearest Lord Hay. "What's that?" I suddenly said to the medium. "The door is opening, I think," said the medium, quite delighted. "That's impossible," I said, "I locked it myself." And Elliot said, "I have the key." "It is opening," someone said in a trembling voice. There was no doubt about it; dark as the room was, one could just see the door opening very slowly, and then a little grey figure entered, as if on wheels. Presently

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

it rose, and as the medium declared afterwards, "it expanded to a height of nine or ten feet." After gasping for a few minutes I rushed to the window, dragging over the medium with me; in fact, we rolled together on the floor. I got the window open and turned on the lights. Elliot was on the ground, having fainted, and Lord Hay was giving him some brandy and bathing his forehead. Almost immediately afterwards Heslewood, with a terrified face, came in from the garden asking what was the matter. There was no sign of the spirit and the door was closed. Elliot went to unlock it, and had some difficulty in doing so, as his hand shook so violently, and the click of the lock was audible all over the room when he turned it. The medium declared that she had never been in such good form before—it was the best work she had ever done, and she had had many fine engagements, so she said, with "the best people."

### A CURIOUS OCCURRENCE

Mention of spiritualism brings to my mind another incident of a very different kind to the events I have related above. I offer no comment and no explanation, as I know of none—I merely state what actually occurred.

In February, 1894, I produced Arthur Law's farce, "The New Boy," and we took it into the country for a fortnight's trial trip before opening at Terry's Theatre, London. I refrain from saying where the following incident occurred, as it might annoy the proprietor of the hotel at which Arthur Law and I stayed.

## ARTHUR LAW HEARS THINGS

'After a very satisfactory dress rehearsal, which concluded about eleven P. M., I was returning with Arthur Law to our hotel, talking earnestly about our prospects of success; I daresay we were both strung up and anxious, as we both had a great deal at stake — he as the author, I as the manager, producer, and leading actor. We turned into the circular drive which led to the hotel and which had very thick high hedges on both sides. It was a lovely night, bright and frosty. When we had gone a few yards we heard a carriage turn into the drive, evidently drawn by a pair of horses and advancing upon us very rapidly. Almost simultaneously we seized each other by the arm and drew back right into the hedge, to avoid the wheels of the approaching vehicle, saying, "Look out, old chap," and "Look out, Weedon," both at the same time turning in the direction of the sounds, which were now very loud and *close upon us*, but to our utter astonishment the sounds of the wheels and horses' feet passed on and died away. There was nothing to be seen, not a sign of either carriage or horses! There was no wind blowing! We looked at each other blankly, uttered a few amazed exclamations, and covered the intervening space between ourselves and the cheerful, brightly-lighted hall of the hotel much more rapidly than we should otherwise have done. We made guarded inquiries then and next day, but a certain reticence was observable in the replies we got, and we only heard that there had been "something odd" there at "some time or another."

Whatever it was, it only portended good to

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

'Arthur Law and myself, for we both had a year of solid substantial success, which commenced the next week with the first performance of "The New Boy."

### HOW I SAW THE BOAT RACE

On one occasion I was the guest of my old friend the late Captain Dean, on the steam launch belonging to the Metropolitan Police, to see the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race. I rose at an unaccustomed early hour — for me — and managed to get on board two minutes before we were timed to leave Westminster Pier. There was a large and most cheery party on board, and I found lots of friends and acquaintances. The wind was cold, and a slight shower fell; it was probably the cause of some of us going into the cabin and remaining there, where we were extremely comfortable and very merry. Presently I emerged from this pleasant retreat; the sun was shining and there was a hum of excitement everywhere. Captain Dean said, "Fine race, was n't it, Weedon?" "What?" I said blankly, thinking I had not heard him aright. "Fine race!" he repeated. "Oxford was *never* behind!"

### MAX O'RELL AND MARK TWAIN

'About 17 years ago I was sitting in the lounge of an hotel at Broadstairs after dinner enjoying a cigarette and thinking of nothing at all, when who should suddenly appear before me with extended hand but Max O'Rell, with the usual remark when one man meets another at a seaside hotel, "What

## MAX O'RELL AND MARK TWAIN

are *you* doing here?" as if one was there under false pretences. I explained I was "resting," which is English for "an actor out of work." Max O'Rell told me he was lecturing throughout England and was delighted at the success he was having. During our conversation to my astonishment who should enter the lounge but Mark Twain. I jumped from my seat and grasped him firmly by the hand, welcoming him to England and exclaiming, "Who do you think is here? Max O'Rell!!" Twain looked a little embarrassed and replied, "I don't think we know each other." "Very good," I said, thinking he was pulling my leg, "then I'll introduce you. Max O'Rell, permit me to introduce you to Mark Twain from the other side of the pond. He writes books! Twain, this is Max O'Rell. He *lectures* as well as writes books," and then I laughed at my own joke. They looked at each other for a few moments without speaking or moving, and I began to realise that something was wrong and that I had somehow put my foot in it, when simultaneously they extended their hands and Twain said, "Grossmith's done it!" and Max O'Rell answered, "And a good thing too!" and they shook hands most heartily. They told me they had quarrelled some years before about a trifling matter and had been estranged ever since. They both seemed delighted to put an end to their grievances, and I never saw two better friends, and need hardly say how delighted I was that my apparently tactless behaviour had been the means of their burying the hatchet and renewing their old friendship. They thanked me for bringing them together again, and sug-

## FROM STUDIO TO STAGE

gested that we should smoke a cigar and stroll about in the open air and enjoy the sea breeze, and I knowing the country better than they did suggested a walk along the cliffs to the right of the hotel. Mark Twain walked in the centre, Max O'Rell on the left side, nearest to the edge of the cliff, and I was on the *inside*. I never saw two men so engrossed in each other's conversation: they were evidently making up for many years of silence and were thoroughly happy, and I contented myself by listening to them, for I could only get a word or two in occasionally.

Although I was the means of bringing these two great men together I was also very nearly the means of terminating their existence altogether, for, as Willie Elliot discovered to his own personal inconvenience some years ago while walking with me, he left the pavement and was in the gutter, owing to my being a "crab." I had never heard the expression before, but it means a person who has the unfortunate habit of walking with a tendency towards the *left* and unconsciously pushing people into the gutter or against a wall, and the night being dark none of us knew we were on the very edge of the cliff until Max O'Rell uttered an American expression accompanied by a wild jump forward clutching Mark Twain by the shoulders. It was then I discovered that I had "crabbed" them to the extreme edge of the cliff, and another half a dozen *inches* would have sent these two famous wits sixty feet down on to the rocks below!! I have never *allowed* myself to remember Mark Twain's language: Max O'Rell's

## THE FUTURE

comments passed over my head — I am not proficient in the French language.

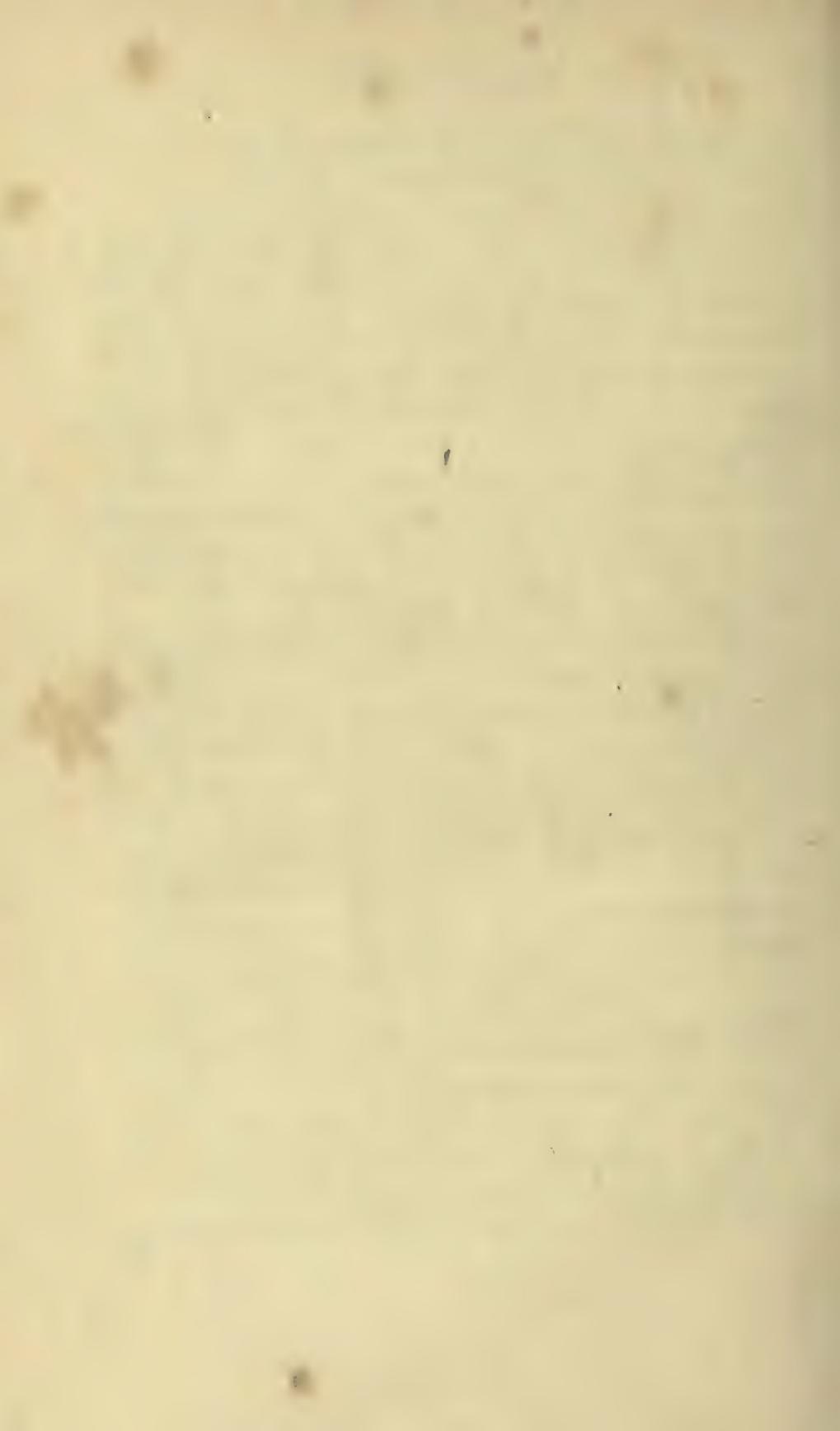
My brother, Gee-Gee, before starting for his first visit to America, made a will, and announcing this fact to the assembled family, said, "I have left all I possess to my wife and my four children." My youngest niece, Cordelia, then a child of seven, looked up anxiously and said, "But what about poor uncle?" She is now the wife of Mr. Frederick Turner, an architect, and author of promise. My elder niece, Sylvia, is married to Stuart Bevan, the well-known barrister and "canooser." I don't regret giving up painting or going on the stage. My motto is "Nothing Matters."

During the time occupied in writing these pages many dear friends have passed away. That of course is natural in the passage of Time! The past is gone, but I am sure everyone has the satisfaction of looking back to some happy days, no matter how hard their life may have been, — but it's gone! There is practically no present! its flight is too rapid to chronicle. But there is a future. At least that is the happy and hopeful belief of

Yours faithfully,

WEEDON GROSSMITH.

So are we downhearted? No!!! Next, please!



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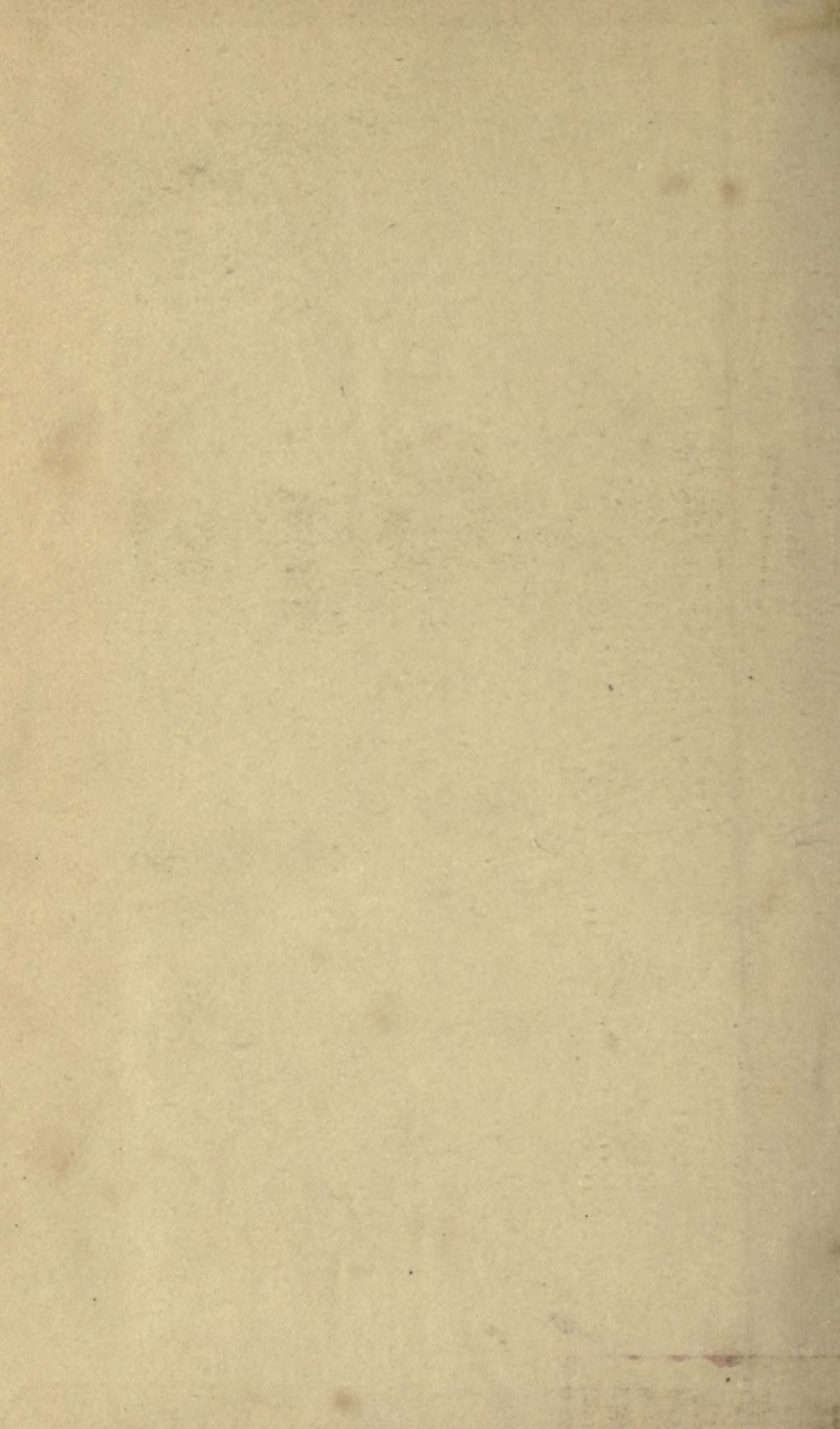
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